



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
ST. JOHN

PART ONE

A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY

**THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
ST. JOHN**

**PART ONE
CHAPTERS 1 TO 8**

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In the Name of
The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
One God.
Amen.

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INEXPRESSIBLE HEIGHTS OF GLORY

During the writing of this book, a certain thought crossed my mind and I often hesitated to document it. I felt sad that I had not begun to enjoy the Gospel of St. John earlier on in my life. Had I done so, I would have spent the rest of my days soaring in the glories that this Gospel offers. These are glories that are hard to communicate in any human language.

As I studied the Gospel of St. John, I came to understand the meaning of what Origen, meant when he wrote his meditations and sermons on this Gospel. He stated that he believed he could not complete his interpretation of St. John until he had passed into heaven. Only there would he be able to complete that task! Indeed, I feel that no one can achieve a full understanding of the depths of St. John's writing; and that all would be revealed only as we meet with our glorified Savior and as we partake in His heavenly glory. Only then will we comprehend the amazing implications of this Gospel, and in a way that transcends all that can be said here.

May the Holy Spirit carry every soul into God's divine embrace. May He enlighten the inner vision so that the soul may enjoy all the divine glory and understanding that our amazing Lord wishes to offer to us. Consequently, we will be ablaze with divine love and longingly seek to meet with our Savior.

**INTRODUCTION TO
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
ST. JOHN**

The Gospel according to St. John answers the need of everyone: the simple and the scholar. St. John's words are extremely simple: hence he appeals to the simple as they find themselves closely drawn and comforted. On the other hand, those with spiritual experience find the opportunity to dive into his writings without ever reaching its depth¹.

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN AND THE EARLY CHURCH

The Gospel according to St. John attracted the heart of the early Church and lifted it to perceive the sublime divine mysteries. This is the result of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, St. John uses a style that is spiritually attractive and which is far removed from difficult philosophical terms or dry theological language.

- ❖ We may venture to say that **the Gospels are the first- born of all the Holy Books, and that from among the Gospels the first- born is the Gospel of St. John.** Unless we lean on the Lord's bosom (Jn 13:23), and accept St. Mary through Jesus Christ as our Mother (Jn 19:27), we will not understand its message. By doing so, we become another St. John, and the Lord Jesus Christ will appear to us just as He had appeared to St. John. According to those who have presented a truthful report about St. Mary, she had no son other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had said to His Mother: "This is your son," (Jn 19:26). He did not say: "This is your son as well." It is as though He was telling her: "This is Jesus whom you have conceived." Indeed, every person who has become perfect does not live but rather it is Christ who lives in him (2 Cor 4:7). And since Christ lives in him, it is possible to refer to him and tell St. Mary: "Here is your son, Jesus Christ."²

Origen

- ❖ All the others - the evangelists Mathew, Mark, and Luke - have risen slightly above earthly matters. That is they have dealt with the events that Jesus did on earth, while they spoke only briefly about His divinity. They seemed to be just like other people who had accompanied Him on earth. **In contrast, the Eagle - that is St. John - is the one to preach the sublime Truth, as well as the one who contemplates and turns with piercing vision towards the inner eternal Light...**

In spite of that, we are the ones who are weak and crawl upon the earth: we walk among men with difficulty, we venture to uphold and comprehend these sublime matters, and we lead ourselves to believe that we have comprehended these issues since we have meditated on them or spoken about them.³

St. Augustine

¹ El Khoury Paul El-Faghaly: *The Gospel of St. John, The Biblical Association, 1992, p. 14 (in Arabic).*

² *Commentary on John, Book 1:23*

³ *On the Gospel of St. John, tr.36: 5*

- ❖ As for the blessed St. John...we find that he possesses a fiery desire and a mind that yearns for matters that surpass the human mind. He ventures and draws close in order to explain the sublime Birth which is impossible to report in its totality - the Birth of God, the Word. Yet he realizes that "It is the glory of God to conceal matters" (Prov 25:2); and that the honor due to God exceeds our understanding and comprehension. Hence, it is hard for anyone to understand or explain the features of the Divine Nature.¹

St. Cyril, the Great

The Gospel of St. John specifically achieves the '**fullness**' of the Holy Bible: it is as though that Gospel represents the '**epicenter**' of the mystery of the Bible.

Fr. Maximus, the Confessor likens the Holy Bible to the Holy Church, and the Gospel of St. John as the **Holy of Holies within Her**. Through St. John's Gospel, we enter into the sanctified depths of the Holy Bible, we get acquainted with Its Mysteries, and we break through the veil.

St. Clement of Alexandria justly calls it the '**spiritual Gospel**' that leads the soul to recognize the glories that have been prepared for her through the love of God the Father, the redeeming act of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. St. Clement finds that the **Gospel of St. John constitutes the spirit while the other three Gospels constitute the body**. The latter present the tangible facts and events in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, His service, and His redeeming work. **The Gospel of St. John comes to present an interpretation of what lies behind these events, and to reveal their depths and implications**. Hence the Gospel is in harmony with the words of the Lord: "...that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (Jn17: 3).

This is the **spiritual Gospel** since it raises the believer into the spiritual world. It does not allow him to remain on the material plane: For when He had satisfied the multitudes with bread, they rejoiced (Jn 6:26), but He invited them to partake of the eternal Food (Jn 6:27).

In the Lord's conversation with Nicodemus about the new Birth, the Jewish scholar's concept was limited to his own mother's womb. However, the Lord Jesus Christ raised him to see with his heart's vision that "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (Jn 3:1-6).

In the Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman, we find that her thought is limited to her material bucket, Jacob's well, and his herds. However Jesus lifts her heart to the Divine Source. From this, He offers her Water that will gush within her into sources of Living Water that flow into eternal life.

When **St. John Chrysostom** began to give sermons about the Gospel of St. John, he spoke about St. John, the evangelist. He presented His Gospel and made a comparison between him and other speakers and actors. He explained how the latter attracted the masses by their skillful use of the language as well as music, and by parading in attractive masks. As for St. John the evangelist, he spoke as though he stood on a heavenly platform: Many of the people to whom he spoke had already become like angels; and he yearned that the rest of his listeners would be transformed likewise. He only armed himself with the Grace of God and considered himself in the company of heavenly hosts. To these, St. John presents the joyful message of the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ *St. Cyril the Great: he interpreted the Gospel of St. John. This was translated by the Center for Patristic Studies, January 1989, pg 12. I have borrowed many of the sayings of St. Cyril the Great quoted in that translation.*

❖ Now this man appears before us: the son of thunder, the beloved of the Lord Jesus Christ, the pillar of all Churches in the world, the one who holds the keys of heaven, who drank of the Lord's Cup, was baptized by His Baptism, and confidently leaned on his Lord's bosom... He entered wearing the robe of incomprehensible beauty, for he appears before us having put on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27). His beautiful feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15); and he is dressed, not with a girdle around his waist, but around his shoulders. His robe is not made of crimson hide, neither is it covered by gold on the outside. But it is woven and fashioned of the Truth Himself. Now St. John appears before us to head and proclaim openly the Truth. He does not appear wearing a mask and ready to play a theatrical role. He does not attempt to force the crowds to believe him, but rather uses gentleness and kindly looks and words to achieve his message without resorting to musical instruments such as the violin or similar objects. Indeed he only uses his tongue and speaks with a voice that sounds sweeter and more effective than a harp or any other musical tool. His platform is all the heavens and his stage is the whole inhabited planet. His band consists of all the angels. As for his hearers, they are human beings, many of whom are angels or wish to become likewise. These will not be able to enjoy fully his words unless they get transformed and demonstrate that change through their acts. As for the rest, they are like young children who hear yet do not understand... they are playful and leisurely, and only live to possess wealth, power, and sensual pleasures. What they hear is the Truth, yet their demeanor does not stress that which is great or noble since they hurry towards the earth that is used to make bricks.¹

❖ He is no longer the fisherman and the son of Zebedee, for he is now the one who knows 'the deep things of God' (1 Cor2:10), and of the Holy Spirit - by this I mean that he plays on that harp. Therefore, we wish we would listen to him. Note that he does not speak to us as a person in any way, for his words come from the depths of the spirit, and from the mysteries that have not been revealed even to the angels. Indeed, the angels have learned about them from the voice of St. John, and at the same time as we have. So they really got to know about matters through us and which we already knew. Another apostle explains this by saying: "...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Eph 3:10). Therefore, if the leaders, powers, cherubim, and seraphim have learned these matters from the church, it becomes clear that they are very eager to listen to these teachings. Indeed, we are granted such a great honor since the angels have learned about these things which they had not known before."²

St. John Chrysostom

❖ **THE WRITER**

❖ The word John means: 'Jehovah is tender.'

❖ He is the son of Zebedee from the house of Sidon in Galilee. The Lord Jesus Christ called him and his older brother, James, to follow Him. Herod Agrippas, the First,

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom1: 2*

² *Homilies on St. John, Hom1: 3*

killed James in the year 44 B.C.

❖ It seems that he was relatively well off as his father used to hire men to handle his boats (Mk 1:20). Moreover, the high priest knew who John was (Jn18; 16). His mother, Salome was a virtuous and pious woman who always followed the Lord (Mk15:40)...She participated with the other women in buying expensive spices for the body of Jesus. Most probably she is the sister of Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 19:25).

❖ He became a fisherman by trade, and he and his brother James were fishing partners with Simon (Lk 5:10). The Lord Jesus Christ chose Simon, Andrew, John, and James to be His first disciples. Because John and his brother had fiery tempers, the Lord named them '**Boanerges**' which means the 'sons of thunder' (Mk3:17). John became the apostle of love. He was extremely gentle and his gospel, letters, and revelations all revolve round '**love.**' He continued to preach about love till his old age. In his interpretation of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, **St. Jerome** reports that in his old age, the disciples of John used to carry him and take him up into the pulpit to hear him utter these words: "My children, love one another. This is the Lord's commandment: if you follow just this one commandment, it will be good enough for you"¹. John is known as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved,' (Jn21:20).

❖ **St. Ireneaus** reports that John was twenty-five years old when the Lord Jesus called him to be His disciple.

❖ Like Peter and James, John is considered from the special ones privileged to be alone with the Lord Jesus in many instances: such as at the Transfiguration (Matt 17:1); the raising of the daughter of Jarius (Mk 5:37); in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt26:37); and at the time the Lord predicted the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (Mk13:3). The Lord entrusted him and Peter to prepare the place where He would hold the Passover with the disciples (Lk 22:8).

He in particular leant on the Lord's chest (Lk 13:23); and he accompanied the Lord and stood at the foot of the Cross where he received St. Mary as his mother (Jn 19:20-27).

❖ After the resurrection of the Lord, he was with Peter when he healed the lame man at the gate of the temple that is called Beautiful (Acts 3:1-6). He was also with Peter when they were sent to Samaria to lay their hands on believers so that they might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).

❖ St. Paul considered him to be one of the pillars of the church (Acts 15:6; Gal 22:9).

❖ He preached in Asia Minor, namely in Ephesus; was tortured under Dematious, and was exiled to the Island of Patmos. There he enjoyed the revelations concerning the Day of the Lord: The book of The Revelation of Jesus Christ. He remained in exile until his death. According to **St. Jerome**, St. John remained in the world for sixty-eight years after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Based on that, he lived for two or more years into the second century A.D. This means that he lived to be almost one hundred, for he was a few years younger than the Lord. Others believe that he died in the year 98 A.D. during the reign of Trojan (98 - 117 A.D.).

❖ In his book 'The History of the Church'², **Eusebius the Caesarian** recounts a story about St. John the apostle. It reveals how much he was concerned, even in his old age, about the salvation of the human soul and the amazing ways he used to fulfill that task. The historian borrowed the story from the book written by **St. Clement of Alexandria** entitled 'Who is the Rich Person Who will be Redeemed?'

The story recounts that after St. John returned from the Island of Patmos; he went to

¹ St. Jerome: *Comm. On Galat.6: 10*

² Eusebius: *Hist. Ecc. 3: 28*

the city of Ephesus to resolve ecclesiastical matters and to appoint bishops. He also visited some of the neighboring pagan areas. In one of these cities close by - probably Izmir - he introduced to the bishop of the local church a young pagan who had accepted faith. St. John was very concerned about him and underlined that that youth would be a trust he delivers into the bishop's hands. The latter consequently tended him until he was baptized. However, the youth soon made the acquaintance of some corrupt youngsters who encouraged him to lead a life of pleasure and squandering. When they needed money, they resorted to stealing and he would join them. Thus he became progressively involved in one crime after another and he even formed and led a gang to steal, plunder, and kill. Eventually, St. John returned to the city and asked the bishop about the youth. The bishop informed him: "He was led astray...he spiritually died, for he has reverted to his evil days and has become an indecent person and a robber. Instead of being a church member, he has gone to the mountains with a gang who shared his disposition." The saint could not bear the news, and asked for a horse that he mounted in spite of his old age. He rode to the area where robbers hid where they captured him and carried him to their leader. Upon seeing the saint, the gangster felt so embarrassed that he tried to flee. However, St. John ran after him and shouted: **"Why are you running away from me? My son, I am your father and I am harmless and advanced in age. If need be, I am willing to die for your sake just as the Lord Jesus Christ suffered death on our behalf. For your sake, I will sacrifice my life. Stop. Believe, for the Lord has sent me to you."** The youth instantly felt ashamed and stopped. He held his head down, and spread his arms in fear while he wept bitterly. St. John was overjoyed and led him back to church, where he stayed with him until he felt assured he would be well.

❖ **St. John Cassian** tells the following story: "As St. John was one day coddling an eagle, a young hunter came by and wondered at the sight. He asked the saint why a great man like him would waste his time as such. The saint responded by asking him: "What are you holding in your hand?" The youth answered: "It is a bow." The saint said; "And why is it loose?" The youth replied: "Because if it remains taut all the time it loses its flexibility which is what I need to have when I shoot an arrow." The old saint said: "Therefore you should not be upset with me, my young friend, because I sometimes release the strings of my soul. Otherwise I would lose its power and I would be let down when I turn to it in the time I need."¹

❖ The historian **Eusebius**² also reports how St. John was extremely concerned about preserving the upright faith from the trends of heretic thoughts. He bases his report on the writings of St. Clement, bishop of Lyon. He reports that the Saint went into a public bath to bathe, and there he heard the heretic Kirnasius (proclaiming that the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is an earthly one; and that He loved to go to dinners and engage in impure physical relationships). Upon hearing that, St. John jumped out in great dismay, and ran away as he could not bear to be under the same roof with that man. He told his companions to follow his example and said: "Let us escape lest the bath would collapse due to the presence of Kirnasius, who is the enemy of truth"³.

❖ Using the words of Apollonius - who is believed to have been a bishop of Ephesus, **Eusebius**⁴ the historian, also tells us that the apostle St. John, by the grace of God, raised a person from the dead.

¹ Collat. XXIV c.2

² Eusebius: Hist Ecc 3:28.

³ Refer also to Eusebius 4:14

⁴ Eusebius: Hist.Ecc 5:18:4.

❖ The scholar **Tertullian**⁵ reports that St. John was thrown into a tub filled with boiling oil and that the Lord rescued him.

PLACE AND DATE OF WRITING

According to the testimony of **St. Iraneus, Bishop of Lyon** (177 A.D. - 200 A.D. approximately), who is a disciple of St. Policarpus, St. John delivered his Gospel to the bishops of Asia where he lived with them until the reign of Emperor Trajan. He had it published in Ephesus.⁶

This testimony continues to be accepted in both the Eastern and Western Churches with hardly any opposition. However, some critics have recently raised doubts concerning the authority of St. John and consequently questioned the place and date of his writings.

Concerning the place of writing, some think it to be **Antioch** or **Syria**. They base their assumption on the information given in the **Acts of Ignatius**⁷ - (which is a document with uncertain date) - and which mentions that St. John was closely bound to Antioch. The response to this is that St. John did stay in Antioch for a short time, but then he went to Ephesus where he resided for a long while..

Other critics believe it was written in Alexandria and their claim to that is that the oldest manuscripts of St. John's Gospel have been found in Egypt. They also explain that the writing reflects a Hellenic style that corresponds to the thought of the School of Alexandria and that had been inspired by Philo, the Jewish Alexandrian thinker. The response to this theory is that the academic climate of Egypt led the School to have it in its possession at a very early date. By having it at the School, the Gospel could play a significant role in the life of her church and its fathers. This does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that it was written in Egypt¹.

Concerning the rejection of some critics to the testimony that the Gospel was written in Ephesus, their view is based on the following:

First: Most of the recent critics confirmed, during the first half of the twentieth century, that the style of writing of the Gospel of St. John is **Gnostic and Hellenic**. They say that it is a style that is not consistent with the First Century after Christ but belongs rather to the Second Century. Therefore, they insist that even if St. John was the one who wrote the original text, yet it had to have been rewritten by a Gnostic hand in Alexandria or Antioch during the Second Century. In 1947, the Manuscripts of the Dead Sea were discovered, as well as the complete Gnostic library found at almost the same time in Naga Hamadi in Upper Egypt. These confirmed the opposite of what these critics insisted upon. Consequently, scholars withdrew and believed in the veracity of ecclesiastic tradition. Most of them became convinced that the Gospel of St. John was written in the First Century and that St. John most probably is the one who wrote it while he lived in Ephesus. We will return to this subject when we will speak about "the Gospel of St. John and Gnosticism."

Secondly: Some critics have tried to raise doubts concerning belief that the Gospel was written by St. John in Ephesus. They claim that the saint was martyred with his brother by Herod Agrippa the First in Jerusalem in the year 44 A.D. They have presented evidence that can be refuted based on the following considerations:

1- In St. Mark's Gospel, chapter 10:39, the verse says that James and John would drink of the same cup as the Lord Jesus Christ. They claim that this means that John must have been martyred with his brother; otherwise St. Mark would have changed

⁵ *Tertullian: Praescrip., Haer., 36*

⁶ *Adv. Haer.3: 1:1 PG 7:844*

⁷ *PG 5:984*

his version. The response to that is that St. Mark was obligated to report the exact words of the Lord Jesus Christ, and had no right to alter any of them, thereby leaving the interpretation to the reader. The Lord used the cup as a symbol to prophecy the sufferings that the two disciples were to undergo. It does not necessarily indicate martyrdom or the spilling of blood². Besides, if Herod had killed the two brothers together, St. Luke would not have mentioned the death of James only (Book of the Acts of the Apostles). He would have mentioned both brothers: **“Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also,”** (Acts 12:2, 3).

2- The critics depended on a brief expression that occurs in the writings of two later authors: namely, Philip of Sidea, a writer of the Fifth Century; and George Hamartolus, who wrote in the Ninth Century. In their writings, they referred to Papayas who stated that the Jews had killed John and James. The response to their statements regarding that matter cannot be taken seriously since these two writers are known to be inaccurate historians³. C.K. Barrett states that Ireneaus and Eusebius are acquainted with the writings of Papayas and that he does not mention anything about the martyrdom of St. John⁴. Moreover, the fact that Philip of Sidea names St. John as the Divine leads one to be suspicious since St. John was not known by that title in the days of Babias- in the Second Century. Concerning what George Hamartolus has written, the matter was not taken seriously as he came back to the subject and reported that St. John had passed away peacefully (without martyrdom).

3- In the Syrian records of the Acts of the Martyrs - 411 A.D.¹ - the commemorations of St. John and St. James are celebrated on the same day, i.e. December 27. They are celebrated as two apostles from Jerusalem. This agrees with the Calendar of Carthage- written in 505 A.D. approximately². Yet some scholars point out the error that is made as the Baptist follows the name of St. John. Moreover, in the sermon of **Fr Avrahat**,³ he says that we may add the names of John and James only to the names of Stephen, Peter, and Paul as apostles who died as martyrs.

The response to the above is that some confusion has occurred between St. John the Baptist and St. John the Apostle. The following provides positive evidence that St. John did not die with his brother:

1- St. John is mentioned as one of the pillars of the Church in Galatians 9:2: and the date to that is after 44 A.D.

2- The archaeological finds of the grave of St. John in Ephesus by Austrian scholars support the traditional ecclesiastic thought⁴.

3- According to Polycrates, the Bishop of Ephesus had written to Victorianus, the Bishop of Rome, in the year 190 A.D. approximately, to confirm that John the Apostle had lived in Ephesus and had died there⁵.

Concerning the **date of the writing of the Gospel of St. John**, it was penned towards the end of the apostle's life. This is based on ecclesiastical tradition. It is clear that it was written after the destruction of the temple of the Jews in Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D- (refer to Jn 2:19, 20; 4:21). Thus the writing took place probably during the period after the believers had been banned from the gatherings of the Jews around the years 85 to 90 A.D. - (refer to Jn 9:22; 16:2).

² Donald Guthrie: *N.T. Introduction*, 1975, p262

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *The Gospel according to St. John*, 1965, p87

¹ Cf. H Leitzmann: *Diedrei altesten Martyrologien (Klein Texte, 2)*, 1911, p.7f

² *Ibid*, p.5.

⁴ Nelson: *A New Catholic Commentary on the Holy Scripture*, 1969, p. 1033.

⁵ Eusebius: *H.E.3: 31:3; 5:24:3f. PG20: 485*

THE AIM OF THE WRITING

The Evangelist tells us about his object in writing the Gospel in the following words: “...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name,”(20:31). Note the following in the above verse:

A- The word ‘believe’ occurs in Greek as ‘pisteonte’ and this appears in the Seniaid, Vatican, and Koredethi versions. It is used in the present tense and not in the past tense to indicate that the Gospel has been written to reinforce a faith that is established already⁶. Hence, he is not presenting a new faith, but rather he seeks to uphold the faith of the church, and which she already enjoys, and seeks to prevent anyone from deflecting from it.

B- The core of faith is that Jesus is the Messiah, and that He is the Son of God. According to W.C.Van Unnick⁷, the word ‘Messiah’ is not a mere title but it necessarily implies ‘the one anointed’: ‘The anointed king.’ In contrast to the Gentiles, this is the issue that only the Jews could recognize. As for the expression ‘Son of God’ the Hellenic world could understand it more than others. In any case, the association of the two expressions was fundamental to indoctrinate and ascertain faith of those from Jewish or Gentile origin. Every believer has to recognize that Jesus is the subject of all the old prophecies, and that He is the Son of God and is consubstantial with Him in essence. Hence He is able to offer redemption and renew our nature.

Scholars have remarked that the word ‘Messiah’ occurs in this Gospel only without any translation and just in its own right. It is as though St. John intends to underline the concept of the Jews. Consequently, we find him presenting us with the words of Philip to Nathaniel: “**We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote...**” (Jn 1:45). Also the invitation of Andrew to his brother Simon Peter: “**We have found the Messiah**” (which is translated, the Christ) (Jn 1:41). This is the picture of the Lord Jesus Christ that we find in the Gospel of St. John from its very beginning - a Messianic picture¹.

It is the picture of Christ as the King and Messiah that the Jews have awaited for long, and Whom the Evangelist ascertains in more than one passage. He reports that when the Lord entered Jerusalem they “...cried out: **Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!**’...His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him,” (Jn 12:13-16). Before Pilate, the Lord admitted that He had a Kingdom (Jn 18:33-37). He was claimed as King of the Jews (Jn 19:3, 12-15, 19, 20). St. John is the only one who reports that the crowds sought Him to crown Him as King but he withdrew from their midst (6:15). The Lord did so because their concept of a Messianic King was different from His own.

This presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ as the **Messiah King** whom the Jews had been awaiting for so long, led some scholars to consider that St. John was a Jewish man with a bitter heart. They explain that this was due to the enmity that the Jews expressed towards the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Lord Charnwood claimed in 1925. However, some scholars, such as F.Taylor, observe that this was not the main object; and that St. John was bitter towards anyone who expressed hostility towards the Lord, whether that came from a Jew or from a non-Jew. Other scholars- such as

⁶ Guthrie, p 271.

⁷ “The Purpose of St. John’s Gospel,” *Stidia Evangelica*. 1959, p382- 411

¹ Guthrie, p.272

A.T. Robinson² -find that the Apostle did not direct his Gospel to the Jews, but rather to Christians of Hellenic origin.

C- The aim of this Gospel is to ascertain the **Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ**, as He is the Son of God. The Apostle had no intention to go into theoretical discussions or philosophical arguments. He just proposes that we enjoy life in His Name. Our faith in the Lord's divinity touches our lives and redeems our very souls.

Consequently, after the New Testament had been written, the first sermon we find in our hands begins with these words³: [It is appropriate for us, dear brethren, to think of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Judge of the living and the dead.

Therefore we should not belittle the issue of our redemption, for if we do, we will be belittling (the Lord Jesus Christ) and will consequently receive so little from Him⁴.]

It is as though this Gospel comes to claim, with greater clarity and elaboration, what the other evangelists have presented to us. It announces the divine aspect. In this context, Origen says: [None of the evangelists announced the Lord's divinity as clearly as St. John. He is the one through whom the Lord says: "**I am the Light of the world**", "**I am the Way, the Truth, the Life**", "**I am the Resurrection**", "**I am the Door**", "**I am the Good Shepherd**".] Moreover, we find in Revelations: "**I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last**"⁵.

In other words, this Gospel presents to us the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son, as well as the implications of this unique relationship in the lives of believers and its role in their redemption. By revealing the Person of Jesus Christ as the only Son of God, St. John wishes us to believe in Him, become saved, and attain eternal life. The evangelist underlines that the Lord's contemporaries neither realized the full extent of His perfection nor the implications of His words nor deeds. That seemed to be beyond their comprehension. His blood relatives, such as His Mother, and His brothers (His cousins), His friends, the Jewish teachers, the priests, as well as the Samaritan woman and Pontius Pilate...all these did not comprehend His words and were astonished at His acts¹.

❖ I dare to say, dear brethren that St. John himself did not speak of the issue in its entirety. Rather, he speaks insofar as he was able to comprehend. For he was a human being who spoke about God. It is true that God inspired him, yet he remained a human being².

St. Augustine

D- The Lord preserved the life of this apostle and did not allow him to be martyred at an early time as the other disciples. It was His will that **St. John would present to the young Church the Truth in a clear manner - the Gospel of St. John - and to lead her to the Day of the Lord so that She could ultimately perceive the opened heavens and the Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

❖ Can't you see, it is not without a reason that we say, this Apostle is speaking to us from heaven? Just observe how, from the very beginning, he attracts the soul upwards, and provides her with wings, and lifts up the minds of his hearers. In this manner, he lifts the soul above all that is tangible matter, and to heights above the earth and sky. He holds the soul's hands and leads her to heights that are above the

² *New Testament Studies*, Number 6, 1960. Pgs.117-131

⁴ *Clem. 1:1:1L2*

⁵ *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John: P1, 6.*

¹ *C.M. Laymon: The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible, 1980, p707*

² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate1: 1*

Cherubim and Seraphim themselves; and even above thrones, authorities, and powers. In a word, he urges her to go on a journey that transcends all creatures³.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ St. Paul's spirit was heaven-bound and he said: "**For our citizenship is in heaven,**" (Phil 3:20). The same is true of St. James and St. John; and therefore were called '**Sons of Thunder**' (Mk 3:17). St. John was like someone who lived in heaven and consequently saw the Word of God⁴.

St. Ambrose

St. John lived into the end of the First Century and was the last one from among the Lord's disciples and apostles to leave this world. He lived to see a new generation of Christians, and he was - if we can correctly say so- the link between the Apostolic Era and the Post- Apostolic one. He wished **to convey the final apostolic word about the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to protect the Church from the invasion of wrong ideas.**

Some scholars find that the Evangelist intended to face some of the Gnostic movements, such as Docetism, as these proclaimed that it is impossible for the Divine Word to become real flesh and incarnated. This was due to their perception of matter as being evil. Consequently, the Apostle ascertains in his Gospel that Jesus is truly the Son of God and that He truly became incarnate. This was not fiction, for he says:

"The Word became flesh." We could not have enjoyed redemption if He had not carried our nature in Him, and actually shared our life. The Evangelist reinforces the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ: in the wedding at Cana and as he takes on the role of everyone's servant. He turns the water into wine, a task that involves creation, yet he presents it as a humble service and does not expect to be given a seat of honor. At the well of Sikhar, the Lord appears tired and thirsty. At the tomb of Lazarus, he is overcome and weeps. In the upper room, he washes His Disciple's feet; and on the Cross, He got thirsty.

The aim of this Gospel is **to link the historical Jesus and the Lord who is present in His Church.** He uses the events that occurred in the life of the Lord to proclaim His nature as the glorious God Who works in His Church¹.

OTHER AIMS OF THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN

Some scholars find that five theories have been proposed about the aim of writing the Gospel of St. John:

- 1- To allow the believer to attain the promise of eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnated Son of God, and to make him experience heavenly matters as the Evangelist himself demonstrates (Jn 20:30-31). This is what we have discussed earlier.
- 2- To answer heretics and contemporary inventions, as well as antagonistic Jews. Doing so entails defending the Christian faith: a matter we will discuss later on.
- 3- The theory of wanting to complete what had been recorded in the other Gospels regarding other events. Among those who hold this theory are Eusebius the Caesarean², and St. Jerome³. It is hard to believe that this is what the Evangelist aimed

³ Homily on St. John, 2:8.

⁴ Letter 22: 5.

¹ Cf. Oscar Cullmann: *The N.T.*, 1968, p46.

² Eusebius: *H.E.* 3: 24.

to accomplish. He really provides us with a revelation of the Holy Spirit through reporting the conversations and discussions between the Lord Jesus and certain persons and groups. These reveal the nature of the Lord, His redeeming mission, and His divine capacities. The Lord puts these to our service, besides granting us His sublime gifts and sending the Holy Trinity to live within us. St. John presents to us a wonderful and practical source of writing about the Living God and provides a most complete body of theological knowledge.

An old tradition holds that St. John wrote his Gospel in answer to the request of the Bishops of Asia Minor who were his partners in the ministry. **St. Clement of Alexandria** reports (in about the year 190 A.D.) the following: [John, who is the last of them all, having understood the apparent facts revealed by the Gospels (the other ones), was urged by his disciples and inspired by the Holy Spirit to write a spiritual Gospel⁴.] It seems as though they requested him to write a theological interpretation to what the Apostles had written earlier on. Though, historically it is necessary to remark that each Evangelist has recorded his Gospel through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and has conveyed a distinctive theological principle that is also complimentary to the other Gospels.

4- St. Clement of Alexandria was inclined to side with what some called the didactic theory, which presents the Lord Jesus Christ as the Teacher. Although this is a fact, yet He is not a Teacher Who presents external or apparent knowledge. Rather, He is a Teacher Who embraces His students as members of His Body, savoring His life as a life they could live and attain as their own.

5- The theory of counteracting contemporary philosophies with the purpose of harmonizing between philosophy and Christian faith does not appeal to us. We do not believe that this is the object of the Holy Spirit. Rather, the object of writing this Gospel is to present the Divine Gospel Truth. It does not mean that this Truth rejects or opposes all philosophies, but that It sifts them and rejects all falsehoods. Especially during the time of St. Clement of Alexandria, the School of Alexandria was preoccupied with studying the possibility of harmonizing between the living Faith and philosophy. This involved what truths they embodied, and not what human beings had corrupted by their dreams and imagination⁵.

THE RESPONSE TO HERETICS, CONTEMPORARY INVENTIONS, AND HOSTILE JEWS

Some of the Church fathers, like **St. Iraneus- Bishop of Lyon¹, St. Jerome², and Victorinus of Pattau**, as well as others, find that the aim of St. John's Gospel is to respond to contemporary heresies and inventions and to the hostile Jews who resisted the Church.

Victorinus of Pattau reports that towards the end of the Third Century and at the beginning of the Fourth Century, St. John wrote his Gospel after he had finished the Book of Revelation. [This was after heretics had spread their writings, such as: Valentinus, Kirethus, Apyon. There were many others who belonged to this satanic school of teachings in all the other parts of the world. This obliged the bishops in the neighboring areas to meet with St. John and obligated him to write a Gospel of his testimony³.]

³ *Comm. On Matt., Prolong.*

⁴ *Eusebius: H.E. 6:14:5-7.PG 20:552*

⁵ *Fr Tadros Y. Malaty: The School of Alexandria, Introduction*

² *Comm.on Matt., prolong.*

³ *PG 5:333*

It is true that the Apostle undertook the defense of Christian faith facing a number of groups who resisted the Church. However, his Gospel is essentially focused on the gift of the Holy Spirit Who has inspired the Evangelist to reveal the Divine Truth in touch with our redemption. Thus, His Gospel does not stop at the negative side. There is no doubt that this Gospel provides a living Source out of which the Church continues to drink and draw strength as she confronts the inventions that appear through the years. In the response of **St. Irenaeus** to heresies, he quoted one hundred verses out of St. John's Gospel. **Hippolytus; St. Athanasius, the Apostle; and St. Cyril, the Great** quoted from him too. **St. Clement of Alexandria** often borrowed from him as well.

FIRST: THE RESPONSE TO THE HOSTILE JEWS

The resistance of the Jews to the Lord Jesus Christ is apparent in the three preceding Gospels. St. John uses the word 'Jew' seventy times, in contrast to its use five or six times in each of the corresponding Gospels. He uses the word to convey different meanings, such as the following:

❖ With a national implication that has nothing to do with religion; for example, in the conversation with the Samaritan woman (9:4).

❖ In the context of religious authority, such as the authority of those in Jerusalem who opposed the Lord Jesus Christ (22:9); 18:3; 8:13).

The Bible makes a distinction between the words '**the Jews**' and '**Israel.**' The latter has a positive meaning and refers to the real inheritance mentioned in the Old Testament. St. John the Baptist had come to baptize with water until Jesus appeared to Israel (1:31). Nathaniel was described as an Israelite in whom there is no guile (1:47). When St. John speaks about the feasts and customs of the Jews (2:6, 13; 7:2) we do not get any sense that indicates embarrassment or scorn.

The Jews resisted the Lord Jesus Christ: "**You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples,**" (9:28). They sought to kill Him, therefore the Lord counted them as '**children of Satan**' (8:44 -47). This is because they wanted to carry out the murderous acts of their father from the beginning of time.

The Jews denied that He is the Messiah and the Son of God (5:18; 8:40-49). They conspired and planned to kill Him (10:30-39; 11:8-50). They banished from their gatherings those who confessed their belief that He is the Messiah (9:22; 12:42).

There was also another group called **The Ibyonions**. These were believers of Jewish origin. They were adamant that it was necessary for Christians to uphold Jewish customs and the tradition of the fathers. In their zeal for Moses and the prophets, they considered that the Lord Jesus Christ was merely the son of David and that he had never existed prior to His incarnation. They believed that the Lord was just a great prophet whom they had been expecting. They called themselves 'Ibyonions': that is a Hebrew word -ebyon- that means 'poor.'

ST JOHN CLARIFIES THE FOLLOWING POINTS IN HIS GOSPEL:

❖ There does not exist any sort of comparison between Moses- the recipient of the Commandments and the Law- and the Lord Jesus Christ the Giver of grace and Truth (1:17). The first provided manna, whereas the Latter is Himself the Bread of Life (Jn 6:23).

❖ The end to Jewish traditions (1:-10).

❖ Worship is not associated with the Temple (2:1-10)

❖ The resentful Jews are not the children of Abraham, but rather the children of Satan

(8:39-44).

❖ The resentful Jews will not meet with Moses to share fellowship in the Lord's glory for he will condemn them (5:45).

SECOND: THE SUPPORTERS OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

Some believe that a few of the disciples formed a group that glorified St. John the Baptist and favored him over Jesus Christ. They believed him to be the greater one since he came before Him, and since he was baptizing. In **Recognitions**, a work credited to **St. Clement**, we are told that these disciples considered St. John the Baptist to be their teacher and not Jesus. These people lived in the Christian world and they opposed Christianity. They were influential, especially in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-8). Those who hold that opinion - that this Gospel has been written to resist those who favor St. John the Baptist- find that the Evangelist ascertains that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Light of the world (1; 8-9); that the Lord came after St. John the Baptist although He really existed before St. John the Baptist; and that the Lord is greater than him (1; 30). Besides, he confirms that the Lord - and not St. John the Baptist- is the Messiah (1:20; 3:28); and that St. John the Baptist came to bear witness for the Lord so that the Lord increases while St. John the Baptist decreases (3:30).

St. John confirms, through the testimony of St. John the Baptist himself, the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ: The Baptist is not the Light but rather he is a witness to the Light (1:6-8); that he is not the Groom but the friend of the Groom (2:28-30); that he is not the Lamb bearing the sins of the world, but that the Messiah alone is the Lamb of God Who bears the sins of the world (1:29).

This Evangelist has clearly proclaimed the deep feelings of the Lord Jesus Christ more than any of the others. This is powerfully apparent in the Lord's final prayer in Chapter 17 when He prays out loud. Thus the Evangelist offers to us a picture of the Incomprehensible Lord which he admits is so hard to express: he leads us into the perfectly divine mystery and reveals the Lord's utter manhood so that we stand in awe and astonishment!

St. John did not ignore the greatness of St. John the Baptist, for he recognized that he was a messenger sent by God (1:60); and that he was the burning and shining light (5:35).

THIRD: THE RESPONSE TO SOME INVENTIONS

St. Iraneus, who lived in the Second Century, mentions in his book '**Against Heresies**' that the Gospel of St. John opposes Kirethus, of Asia Minor, who is the proponent of the Gnostic trend. St. Iraneus believes that Kirethus claimed that the Lord is the son of Joseph and that the Messiah is a heavenly element that descended upon Him at the time of His baptism, and that It departed from Him after His death. He also claimed that the Creation occurred through a creative power and not through God.

St. Iraenius, the Bishop of Lyon mentions Ibyion together with Kirethus; and this led **St. Jerome** to believe that the Gospel of St. John was written to answer Ibyion and his followers who belonged to a conservative Christian faction.

There is also the opinion that St. John's Gospel is directed against **the declared Docetists** who spoke about visualization concerning the body of the Lord. They claimed that Jesus, the Messiah, did not really become incarnated and that His body was not real but seemingly real or ethereal, or a fancy of the mind. Hence He appeared to be human and consequently His suffering and death were manifested.

FOURTH: A CALL TO DISPERSED CHRISTIANS OF JEWISH ORIGIN

St. John mentions twice those who have believed in the Lord but who lacked the courage to proclaim their faith. Such people feared they would be banished from the meetings of the Sanhedrin. Mention is first made in Ch 12:42: **“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.”** The second mention occurs in Ch 19:38: **“After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus.”**

FIFTH: SUPPORTING ALL CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD, REGARDLESS OF ORIGIN

The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to be the Light for every person (1:9). He is the Lamb of God Who carries the sins of the world (1:29); He came to redeem the world (3:16); having been raised on the Cross, He attracts everyone to Him (12; 23); for He is the Savior of the world. The Jews scornfully wondered if He would go to the Dispersion to teach the Greeks (7:35). Thus they prophesied unwittingly of the work He would do among the Gentiles. We hear about that from some of the Greeks who asked Philip: **“Sir, we wish to see Jesus,”** (12:20-21). In talking about His task as a Good Shepherd, Jesus ascertains that He has other sheep that do not belong to this fold and that He must bring them so that there will be one flock and one Shepherd (10:16). In 4:35, we learn that the Lord has come to save not only the Jewish nation but to gather and unify the dispersed children of God. Some Samaritans made the acquaintance of the Lord and recognized Him as the Savior of the world. He Looked upon the fields of Samaria and found that they were white and ready to be harvested (4:35).

THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS¹

Although the Gospel of St. John is different from the analogous or Synoptic Gospels- the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke- yet we cannot chop it completely away from them. This is because the Evangelist assumes we have knowledge of the preceding three publications; or that at least we are familiar with the tradition on which they are based ².

The first ecclesiastical opinion is embodied in the words of **St. Clement of Alexandria³** and this states that St. John wanted to present a spiritual interpretation to the three Gospels written earlier. This opinion has prevailed throughout the ages and is still accepted by many scholars. However, some recent critics find no positive or negative relationship between this Gospel and the other three. Others believe that St. John knew St. Mark and St. Luke but did not know St. Matthew.

It is worthy to note that we assume that the reader is familiar with the other three Gospels. For example, in John 1:40 St. Andrew is introduced to us as follows:

“...Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother...” although no previous mention had been made of St. Peter. In John 6:67, St. John assumes that the reader is familiar with the

¹ *We have previously dealt with the Synoptic Gospels in the Introduction of the book: The Gospel according to St. Matthew, 1983, p.18-23.*

² *Cullmann, p.45.*

³ *Eusebius: H.E.6: 14:5-7*

twelve disciples. In John 1:23- 34, he records St. John the Baptist's witness for the Lord, and assumes that the reader knows about the Lord's Baptism at his hands. Some are of the opinion that the three Gospels are similar to the itinerary or journey of the Lord Jesus Christ from Galilee to the holy City where He offered Himself as the unique Passover offering. On the other hand, they find that the Gospel of St. John relates a number of occasions when Jesus resided in Jerusalem; and he mentions the feast of the Passover three consecutive times. Finally, he speaks about the eve of the last Passover when the Lord died as the Lamb of God in order to present a new feast for the whole world, to be filled with the joy of His Resurrection, an event that would be commemorated and celebrated as "the Christian Passover."

St. John the Beloved has recorded this Gospel through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and after the time of the writing of the three Synoptic Gospels. He records his Gospel to the universal Church to clarify the nature of the Savior, who is the divine and eternal God, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world

❖ It is for a good reason that St. John begins his story with the Eternal Presence. In contrast, St. Matthew starts his Gospel with the relationship of the Lord with Herod, the king; whereas St. Luke starts with Tiberius Caesar; and St. Mark starts with the Lord's baptism at the hands of St. John the Baptist. St. John skips all these matters and **crosses over all the times and ages**¹.

❖ Why does St. John speak briefly about God's plan: "And the Word became flesh..." (14), whereas the other evangelists began by speaking about it? He left out all the other matters: the pregnancy, His birth, His upbringing, and His growth to... speak promptly about His eternal Being? ...He does so in order to frustrate those who wish to belittle that subject, and **to attract them towards heaven**. That is why it is for a good reason that he starts his story from a heavenly peak and from the eternal Being. Thus while St. Matthew, St. Luke and St. Mark begin by speaking respectively about king Herod, Tiberius Caesar, and the Baptism of St. John the Baptist; St. John the Evangelist abandons all these matters and draws the minds of his listeners to the 'Beginning.' He does not wish their thoughts to be attached to any detail or be bound by certain limits as the other evangelists have done by mentioning Herod and Tiberius and John. What we are trying to indicate is that it is astonishing that **St. John, who dedicated himself to this sublime teaching, did not ignore the Plan (of Redemption). The other evangelists were not confined to these limits either and are not silent about His actual Being before all ages**. It is for a good reason that One Spirit moved all these souls and they therefore demonstrated great harmony in their stories².

St. John Chrysostom

❖ St. John was particularly favored, above all the other companions and evangelists, and granted a special gift from the Lord. He leaned on His chest during the Passover - an indication that he drank deeper mysteries out of the Lord's profound heart. Consequently, he spoke of matters that pertained to the Son of God. These matters could arouse the curious minds of children but they would not satisfy them as they are beyond their comprehension. On the other hand, for those who are more developed and have attained some kind of inner manhood, these matters provide words that can be experienced and are fulfilling¹.

❖ In the four gospels, or more correctly in the four books that constitute one message

¹ Hom.4. PG 59:27.

² Homily 4:1.

¹ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate18: 1

of good news or ‘gospel’, St. John is deservedly likened to an ‘eagle’ due to his spiritual discernment. Through his words, he has achieved greater and more sublime heights than all the other three evangelists. By his ascendance, he has sought to elevate our hearts too. This is because the other three evangelists walked with the Lord on earth as though He was a human being. They speak very rarely about His Divinity. As for St. John, it is as though he belittles His passage on earth- as is evident in the introduction. He shakes us with his thundering words and carries us not merely above the earth, but beyond all the surrounding air and skies. Indeed, he carries us above all the angelic hosts and other ethereal armies. Thus he attains the One Whom ‘**all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made**’².

St. Augustine

St. John relates only the following events in the way the other three gospels do, but that is where all resemblance ends:

- * The Lord’s Baptism- (by implication) 1:23-34.
- * The Cleansing of the Temple 2:13-16.
 - * The Feeding of the Crowds 6:1-13.
- * Walking on the Water 6:16-21.
- * The Anointing in Bethany 12:1-8.
- * The Lord’s Triumphal Entry in Jerusalem 12; 12-19.
- * Announcing the Betrayal 13:21-30.
- * His Sufferings and Resurrection presented in a special way.

Besides, St. John mentions seven miracles only. He chooses them out of countless miracles and wonders; and the ones he relates are new to us since any other evangelist does not relate them. An exception to that is the Lord’s walking on the waters; and the feeding of the crowds, which he records as an introduction to his words about the Eucharist.

St. John mentions events and conversations that have not been mentioned by any of the evangelists and thus his words are new to our ears. He does not repeat what has been mentioned before, such as the birth of Christ, His lineage, His temptation, the sermon on the mount, the transfiguration, the parables, the last supper, the suffering in the garden of Gethsamene, the resurrection, etc...he is often satisfied by merely alluding to them.

THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN IN THE LIGHT OF THEOLOGY AND HISTORY

There is no doubt the St. John’s Gospel has a distinctive character that sets it apart from the other gospels. Thus if the latter have been inspired by the Holy Spirit for a historical purpose while each, at the same time, focuses on one specific aspect of the Lord Jesus Christ; then this Gospel has an overwhelming theological nature, even though it is also presented within a historical framework.

St. Mark mentions one trip from Galilee to Jerusalem (Mk10:1). As for St. John, he mentions three trips (Jn2:13; 5:1; 7:10). In St. Mark’s Gospel, the event of the cleansing of the Temple is related towards the end of the book (Mk 11:15); whereas in St. John, it is mentioned near the beginning (Jn 2:13 etc...).

St. John the Evangelist focuses on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He wishes to proclaim that the Word of God Who transcends time has submitted to time, and

²St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 36:1*

consequently holds a place in the history of mankind. Actually, he did not wish his Gospel to be an exposition and history of the life of the Lord; but rather intended to underline His reality as the Logos - the Divine Word, the Light, the Truth, the Life, the Resurrection, etc...It is as though this Gospel intends to ascertain that to experience the internal joy of the Kingdom of God, it is essential to get acquainted with the Person of the Messiah and Redeemer; and to realize how His mysteries work within us. That is why the Lord submitted to time and **‘the Word became flesh’** (1:14).

As human beings, we are clothed with flesh that obeys and submits to the factor of time. By willingly submitting to time and invading our history through His incarnation, the Lord Jesus Christ has not shattered time but has sanctified it in a special manner. That could explain why St. John speaks intensely about the ages and the times.

He says:

“...now it was about the tenth hour...” (1:39);

“...it was about the sixth hour...” (4:6; 19:14);

“It has taken forty-six years to build the Temple...” (2:20);

“...and it was winter.” (10:23);

“And it was night.” (13:30).

The Apostle’s interest in recording time could be to underline that the Lord had a real body and became part of the history of mankind. His incarnation was not mere fiction as some have claimed, such as the Docetists.

As St. John delves deeper into theology, and as he is the first theologian, he explains to us God’s Intention and “Plan” (in Greek, ‘eikos ecomomia’, eikos meaning house, nomos meaning law or tradition): **“Wisdom built herself a house”** (Prov 9:1).

Wisdom is the Lord, and the first house for Him is the holy Virgin Mary. By His incarnation through her, the Lord came into the world. The holy Virgin is the image of the Church that is also the house of God (1 Cor 3:9-17)¹.

THE RISE IN THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HISTORICAL ASPECT

Recently, some scholars have attempted to interpret the Gospel of St. John from a purely theological perspective, and thereby missing its historical value. However, they have found themselves faced with this reality: this theology has been recorded within a historical framework². Consequently, the trend grew towards the inclusion of the historical, social, and geographical aspects of this Gospel; giving special importance to the events that have been recorded in it and are not found in the other Gospels.

Examples of these studies are those made by each of these scholars: Albright, Higgins, Leal, Pallard, Stauffer, and others. These have focused on the following³:

1- The events recorded in Chapter four which speak about the Samaritans: their theological beliefs, their manner of worship on the Mount of Ghorazim, and the exact location of Jacob’s well.

2- In Chapter five, there is detailed information about the pool of Bethesda: its name, location, and architecture.

3- Theological essays concerning the Feast of the Passover (Chapter 6); and the Feast of the Tabernacles (Chapter 7, 8). These provide us with accurate information about certain celebrations and feasts, and the readings made in the Jewish Temple during

¹ *The Monastery of St. George for Skills, The Gospel of St. John, A Reading and Commentary, 1986, p.10.*

² *The Anchor Bible: R.E.Brown: The Gospel according to John (1-X11), 1981, p. XLI.*

³ *The Anchor Bible: R.E.Brown: The Gospel according to John (1-X11), 1981, p. XLI1.*

these occasions.

4- Specific details about Jerusalem: such as those mentioned about the pool of Siloam (9:7); Solomon's Porch being a shelter in the winter time (10:22-23); and the Pavement in the court of Pontius Pilate (19:13). In other words, we may state that this Gospel presents us with accurate knowledge about Palestine before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. and the demolition of its landmarks.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL

1- A Gospel of Divine Holiness

This Gospel reveals to us God's holiness in a marvelous and joyful way. The word 'holiness' in Greek is 'ayios' and means non-terrestrial. Holiness is a name that pertains to God alone and St. John uses it to proclaim matters beyond our comprehension. In the past, God's holiness was associated with fear:

"...so that all the people who were in the camp trembled," (Ex 19:12 -25).

"You cannot see My Face, for no man shall see Me and live" (Ex 33:20).

"Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips...For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts," (Is 6:5).

The Gospel of St. John reveals to us the depths of the New Testament as he announces that the Heavenly has descended on earth and His holiness is associated with glory and not with fear: **"...the Word... dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory..."** (Jn 1; 14).

2- A Gospel of Faith Activated by Redemptive Love

This Gospel is characterized by its use of certain terms that are repeated, and that are different from those that occur in other Gospels. Probably, the most important words repeatedly used are: **believe-** (98 times); **know-** (55 times); **live-** (55 times); **testify-** (21 times). These words have not been repeated at random or without reason, but it is done by the will of divine inspiration in order to reveal the aim of this Gospel: that is to instill **faith based on spiritual knowledge, so that man may live with a spirit of love.**

Note that the word 'believe' has been used 98 times, out of which it has occurred 74 times in the first 12 chapters. These chapters are called 'the book of wonders or miracles', and they cover seven miracles made by the Lord. They all seem to focus on 'faith' as it is the mysterious essence of our life and redemption. Note also that the word '**believe**' occurs in this Book 39 times to convey not just the belief in the Lord's words, but the necessity that **man surrender himself to God or that he move towards Him in a practical manner** and as indicated in 12:11: **"...because on account of Him many of the Jews went away and believed in Him."** It could be that the word originates from the Hebrew language and means that a person surrenders himself trustfully ¹.

The word '**know**' occurs repeatedly too. This enables the Apostle to ascertain that faith, that implies the trustful surrender to God, involves the surrender of the wise soul that **accepts God's love and becomes acquainted with his mysteries**, and consequently runs into His embrace. Faith is not accepted by the foolish, and it does not imply ignorance, but it goes side by side with real knowledge. That is especially true of the knowledge God Himself reveals and makes acceptable to the mind; for even though it exceeds the mind's ability, yet it does not oppose or contradict one's being in any manner.

Knowledge in this context does not imply mere theoretical understanding. It implies full unity and integration with Love and Truth: fellowship with Life. The Evangelist clarifies this point in his First Epistle: **“...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ,”** (1Jn:1:3).

The purpose of that knowledge is to have ‘fellowship with God’ so that he may live and work within us. Consequently, **we will embody the nature of His love.** This love is a sacrificial love that He pours within us so that we may experience and live it in practice. The Gospel tells us: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life,” (3:16). This is the redeeming love that the Son has offered, as the Lord explains:

“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself,” (12:32).

“...when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end,”(13:1). Faith in the Cross enlightens our perception, and enables us to get acquainted with God as the redeeming Lover of mankind. Hence the Lord confirms:

“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He,” (8:28). We

will know Him as the living God, who loves His creation to the very end.

That explains how faith is associated with knowledge and love: leading man to experience the living faith through spiritual knowledge, and to practice the nature of love.

The Redeeming Love that we taste and that consequently leads us to respond to God with love arises from the eternal nature of love that exists between the Father and the Son (3:35; 15:9). Through that love, we too show it towards one another (13:14).

Thus, the evangelist St. John, who is the apostle of love, speaks to us about the following:

- God’s love for the Lord Jesus Christ.
- God’s love for mankind revealed through offering His only begotten Son.
- The Lord Jesus Christ’s redeeming love for mankind, especially in His farewell words.
- Our love for God.
- Our love for one another as an indication of our fellowship with the Divine Love.

3- The Gospel of Truth

The word **‘truth’** occurs in this Gospel 25 times. It is used in a different sense than that used by the Gnostics or the Hellenic writers¹. Here ‘truth’ is not the fruit of mere human thought, or a human philosophy to be acquainted with. Rather, it is the **‘evangelical truth’** that implies the following:

First: The Divine Word Himself who frees the soul from bondage to sin: **“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,”** (8:32). Through the Divine Word, we become holy according to the farewell words of the Lord: **“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth** (17:17).

Second: It is divinely announced to us, for the Lord says: **“He who is from God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God,”** (8:47). Also, **“ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom God will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”** (14:26).

Third: Truth implies living and practicing a way of life: “But he who does the

¹ Nelson: *A New Catholic Commentary on the Holy Scripture*, 1969, p 1035

truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen that they have been done in God,” (3:21). **“...Walking in truth,”** (2 Jn:4).

4-The Gospel of the Spirit

The Evangelist transports us to the realms of divinity in order to acquaint us with the holy mysteries. He enables us to taste and experience them. In this way, there is no need for human controversies or philosophical debates. Rather, there is the need for the Holy Spirit Who enlightens our inner sight. Since it is the Spirit that inspires the Apostle to write, then he asks his readers to enjoy the work of the Spirit.

Consequently, they will be enabled to understand the mysteries of the written Word, and perceive the redemptive Divine work as events unfold.

The disciples were not spiritually guided to understand the words of the Lord Jesus Christ until He was glorified, for He said to them: **“Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up”...“Therefore when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said,”** (Jn2:19, 22). **‘His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him,’** (12:16). **‘For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead,’** (20:9).

They had heard the words of the Lord and witnessed the events, yet they needed the Spirit to open their inner sight so that they could understand and believe. It is for this reason that St. John underlines that physical sight alone is insufficient and that faith is what grants the sight to gain inner vision.

‘Jesus said to them: “But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe,”” (6:36).

“ And this is the will of the Father who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up the last day,” (6:40).

“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,” (20:29).

‘...And immediately blood and water came out. And he who had seen testified and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe,’ (19:34, 35).

‘Then the other disciple who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed,’ (20:8).

The Gospel clearly states that there are those who perceive with the physical eye, but do not discern with their inner vision: **‘And Jesus said: “...I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be blind”,’** For it is through faith that the Gentiles saw the One Whom they had not seen actually in the flesh. In contrast, the Jewish leaders were blinded in spite of having seen Him with their own physical eyes.

The same principle of physical and spiritual sight applies also to the sense of hearing. There are those who hear the sound with their ears yet their inner ears are closed. The Bible tells us: **‘Then a voice came from heaven, saying: “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered...’** (12:28, 29).

❖ The words of St. John do not matter at all to those who do not wish to be liberated from this earthly bestial world. Moreover, no benefit is gained from worldly matters. Thunder shocks us, as it is a sound void of meaning; whereas the voice of that Man comforts a believer and relieves his weariness. It does not upset us: it upsets devils

only and their slaves.¹

St. Augustine

5- The Gospel Witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ

There is no doubt that the essence of apostolic life is to be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. And St. John writes his Gospel to proclaim his testimony for the Lord as He is the **‘Messiah, the Son of God.’** He presents his confirmation in a manner that would appeal to the mentality of the Jews and within the framework of their traditions. Therefore he presents a number of different testimonies:

A- The Testimony of the Law for Jesus Christ: St. John clearly explains that He fulfills what came in the Books and prophecies, which specifically refer to the events pertinent to His sufferings (12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 18:9; 9:24; 19:24, 36). The Lord Himself asks us to search the Scriptures (5:39).

B- The Testimony of St. John the Baptist: (1:7, 15, 19, etc...; 3:26, etc...; 5:53, etc...).

C-The Samaritan Woman: (4:39).

D- The Testimony of the Crowds: (12:17)

E- While the Lord proclaims that man cannot be his own witness, He clarifies that the Father witnessed for Him on various occasions: (5:31-36; 8:17 etc...; 10:37; 14:10 etc...).

F- The Testimony of the Holy Spirit for Him (15:26, etc...).

G- The Testimony of the Disciples for Him (15:27).

We will postpone, at this point, writing about the testimony for Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the confirmation of His divinity. We will deal with these issues when we get to the main exposition of the Gospel in order to avoid repetition and unnecessary extension. Actually, this subject is the core of the Gospel and the Evangelist opens and ends his Book with it: he clarifies the eternal relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. This is what angered the Jews and drove them to seek to kill Him (5:18).

Notice how St. John, the beloved, focuses the **light of the Lord Jesus Christ** on certain persons as he relates them to the Lord. Thus, he calls St. Mary **‘the mother of Christ’**, and calls himself as **“the disciple whom Jesus Loved.”** It is as though the saints carry names merely to indicate their closeness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

6- The Gospel for the New Commandment or the Gospel of Love

Although this Gospel has not reported the Sermon on the Mount, or the Parables of the Lord, or any rules related to Him specifically; yet it presents to us a new commandment that the Lord has focused upon. This commandment is neither a charter of rules nor a code of laws. Rather, it is a way of love that does not burden man but that offers fellowship in the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lover of Mankind. He Himself says: **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another,”** (13:34, 35).

He spoke in length about the relationship of God and the universal Church as being one of love. Union with the Church is like union between newly wedded couples. St. John the Baptist describes the Lord as the Groom/Bride of the Church: **“He who has the bride is the bridegroom...therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled,”** (3:25-28). He also ascertains that growth is achieved by eating His Body: **“I am the living bread**

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom1: 4.*

which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever...” (6:48-51). The Lord likens Himself to the good Shepherd (10:11); the Doorkeeper (10:3); and the Door (1:7). He then describes Himself as the Vine and the Church as the Branches (Ch 15).

In this Gospel, the writer is described as the one who leaned on the Lord’s bosom, and as the disciple whom Jesus loved. The Lord is depicted as the One who shares with people their daily lives as for example in the wedding at Cana (Jn 2); and at the tomb of Lazarus, when the Lord shares the grief of the sisters and weeps (Jn 11). The same is evident when the faith of someone grows weak: as in the case of Thomas, and the Lord strengthens him (20:27-28); and when Paul fails, the Lord encourages him not to retreat and supports him by telling him about love (21:15-18). St. John introduces the Lord’s farewell speech by saying:

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (13:1). This is no exaggeration, for He sacrificed Himself for our sakes: **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (3:16).

Note that in the Gospel of St. John, there is no explicit parable except when the Lord speaks about the good Shepherd (Jn 10).

7- The Messiah of the Joyful Youth

The Lord began His service by attending the wedding at Cana, for He is the Friend of young people and the Source of their joy. St. John does not mention the names of the couple at whose wedding the Lord went and made His first miracle (Jn 2). They were probably related to the Lord by family ties and consequently He had been invited with His mother to attend.

8- The Gospel records the Dialogues of the Lord

Most of these come in the form of questions or arguments directed to Him. Through His responses, the Lord reveals the truth about Himself and His mission. As examples, we mention the following:

* **Nathaniel:** “How do you know me?” (1:48).

* **The Jews:** “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?” (2:18).

* **Nicodemus:** “How can these things be?” (3:9).

* **The Samaritan Woman:** “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” (4:9).

* **The Jews:** “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” (6:52).

* **At the Feast of the Tabernacles:** “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?” (7:15).

* **The Crowds:** “You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill you?” (7:20).

* **The Scribes and the Pharisees:** “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” (8:5).

* **The Jews:** “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free’?” (8:33).

- “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (8:48).

- “Are You greater than our father Abraham who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do you make Yourself out to be?” (8:53).

- “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” (8:57).

* **The Disciples:** “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (9:1).

That is how this Gospel achieves its aim: it presents the questions and the arguments

and how the Lord answers and reveals His mysteries!

The Gospel also contains **a number of general speeches and that could be directed to certain people:**

- 1- Baptism and the New Birth (3:1-21).
- 2- Eternal Life (4:5-21).
- 3- The Source of Eternal Life (5:19-47).
- 4- The Bread of Life (6:29-59).
- 5- The Teacher of the Truth (7:14-29).
- 6- The Light of the World (8:12-20).
- 7- The Crucified Lord is the focus of faith (8:21-30).
- 8- The Spiritual Liberator (8:31-59).
- 9- The Good Shepherd (10:1-180).
- 10- The Oneness of the Divinity (10:22-38).
- 11- The Savior of the World (12:20-36).

The Gospel also presents the Lord's farewell speeches to His disciples. He speaks to them about the following:

- 12- His Death on behalf of the Whole World (12:20-36).
- 13- Holiness and Sanctification (13:31-14:31).
- 14- Union with the Lord (15:1-27).
- 15- The Holy Spirit, the Comforter (16:1-33).

9-A Liturgical Gospel

The Gospel of St. John is the most 'liturgical' of all Gospels. In other words, it proclaims the mysterious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. He announces the presence of the Lord at the wedding of Cana - not as a mere guest- but as the mystery of a hidden joy as He turns the water into wine. He reveals His divine presence through His conversation with Nicodemus, at night, about the mystery of baptism. This is also portrayed in the healing of the man of Bethesda.

As soon as the Lord gave up His spirit, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear. At once, water and blood came out (19:34). This is the Blood of the Eucharist, and the Water of Baptism. It is as though the Church is born at this instance: a new Eve is born from the side of the second Adam.

Thus the Messianic events and speeches in this Gospel have a truly liturgical quality embodying ecclesiastical mysteries. Examples are found in the dialogue of the Lord with Nicodemus about the new birth or baptism (Jn3), and in His speech with the crowds that can be called Eucharistic speech (Jn 6).

10- The Gospel of Power and Energy

The Gospel of St. John is characterized by a distinct and dynamic energy. It offers us the flow of creation towards the Father through the Messiah and the Lord Jesus Christ: "...Jesus knew...that He had come from God and was going back to God," (3:1, 3). It is a true Passover episode through which the Lord raises believers into the Father's embrace through the Cross. He says: "Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (5:56).

The Gospel of St. Mark is likened to a lion as it makes believers rejoice with the heavenly hosts, singing hymns of victory and thereby sounding like conquering lions. The Gospel of St. Luke is likened to a bull's face: a symbol of believers who give their lives as a sacrificial offering of love to God in the name of the Lord Who is the true sacrificial Offering. The Gospel of St. Matthew is likened to the face of a man. In contrast, the **Gospel of St. John is likened to an eagle that carries us up and soars**

to the heights of divinity. He leads us upwards into the heavens themselves to acquaint us with the sublime mysteries of God, and hence we can exclaim: "...and we beheld His glory!" (1:14).

11- His Interest in Certain Numerals

For example, **the number 3** is used to record in the following instances:

- * The Lord goes to Galilee three times.
- * In Galilee, He chooses to do three miracles;
- * The Lord goes to Judea three times;
- * There, He does three miracles;
- * The Gospel records three out of the seven pronouncements the Lord makes while hanging on the Cross!
- * It speaks of three appearances of the Lord after His Resurrection.

He was also interested in the number 7:

- * The Gospel mentions seven witnesses for the Lord (review the section here entitled A Gospel witnessing for the Lord, the Messiah)
- * In the whole Gospel of St. John, only seven miracles/ wonders performed by the Lord are recorded.
- * The expression 'the last Day' is repeated seven times.

12- His Style is Absolutely Overwhelming

In reading the Gospel of St. John, the believer experiences a special pleasure for he discovers the ultimate in spiritual inspiration. The style is pure and extraordinary in that the writing is robed in apparent simplicity. The topic is the 'Messiah' Himself Who is the 'Word of God.' It is He Who raises the soul to enable her to discover the Divine Mysteries through Him and with no intermediary.

St. John lived for more than half a century after the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. He meditated on Him by the help of the Holy Spirit Which the Lord had promised to send: "...for He dwells with you and will be in you...He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you," (14:17, 26). "...He will guide you into all truth..." (16:13). His personal experience with the Lord during His life on earth, and the special place he held as His disciple, enabled his soul to take flight, through the Holy Spirit, and explore heavenly matters. Consequently, his spirit enjoyed her beloved and glorified Lord Jesus Christ; and he was enabled to write, by the spirit, this Gospel. He sought to elevate every soul so that it would taste that very same experience.

13- The Last Book of the Holy Bible to be Written

We have mentioned that **this Gospel is distinguished from among the Synoptic Gospels** as it was written towards the end of the First Century. It was probably the last book of the Holy Bible to be written. It was done with the purpose of completing, rather than repeating, what had been written before. Consequently, it possesses the following features:

- * Whereas all the written Gospels are concerned with the service of the Lord in Galilee, and have not dealt with any other trip except the one the Lord took to Jerusalem in the last week of His life on earth; this Gospel is more concerned with the Lord's service in Judea, in Jerusalem, and in the Temple. That explains why some have called the first Gospels 'Galilean' Gospels, while they called St. John's Gospel 'The Jerusalem Gospel.'

* The first Gospels relate in simple language the Lord's interaction and dialogues with the common people. As for 'The Jerusalem Bible', it deals with the interaction between the Lord and the Jewish scholars and leaders more than with His interaction with the public. Consequently, some scholars claim that the Messiah of the Synoptic Gospels seems to be different than the One portrayed in 'The Jerusalem Gospel.' Actually, it is the Lord Jesus Christ Who speaks to the people in a common language: He draws on examples from their daily lives, is He Himself who uses another form of language when he converses with scholars and frankly reveals Himself and His Father. This led the disciples to tell Him: "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech!" (16:29).

14- A Combined Artistic and Historical Unity

The Gospel of St. John represents an artistic and historical unity, so wonderful and unique. The Lord's sermons and dialogues are linked to events concerning time, place and objectory. St. John includes seven miracles linked to seven speeches that reveal the nature of the Lord and His divine mysteries.

15- The Use of Analogy

This Gospel is distinguished by its use of analogy or parallels. We mention the following as examples of this feature:

* The Book of Genesis begins by the sentence: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' St. John starts his Gospel as follows: 'In the beginning was the Word...All things were made through Him...'

* The act of Creation was completed in six days; and the renewal of the Creation started from the sixth day after St. John the Baptist began witnessing for the Lord (1:19-2:1), to the moment the Lord attended the wedding at Cana. At that event, He changed the water of our lives into the wine of His love.

* We find a parallel and contrast between the vacillating Nicodemus, a Jewish leader (Ch 3), and the Samaritan woman who is an outsider yet witnesses for Him and attracts the whole city (Ch 4).

* When he spoke about eating His holy Body, many were repulsed (6:66). This is paralleled and contrasted by the disciples' increasing devotion to Him. This is expressed by St. Paul who says: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life... ." Also, we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," (6:68, 69).

* When the Lord opened the eyes of the person who was born blind (Ch9), the Pharisees met to challenge Him and claimed that He was a sinner (9:24). In contrast, the one who was healed witnessed for Him right before their eyes and challenged them with his words. Therefore the Lord said: "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be blind," (9:39).

16- Variations in Style

St. John's Gospel displays a variety of styles. Thus he sometimes uses symbolism, at others he uses a narrative style, besides using dialogue, sermons, logical reasoning- (Sophism), didactic or instructive style... However, all along, he maintains a harmony and fluency that achieves a unified and complete literary work that indicates that it is written by one person.

Indeed, one of the features that characterize this Gospel is its language. While the expressions 'the kingdom of God' and 'the kingdom of heaven' occur often in the

Synoptic Gospels, they are used twice only in St. John's Gospel. In contrast, the expression 'I am He' is repeated in this Gospel while it is not found in the other Gospels¹.

THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Gospel of St. John is considered the Gospel that quotes the least or that quotes indirectly from the Old Testament. In the Greek text- the 'Nestle Greek Text'- we find only 14 quotations taken from the Old Testament. In the 'Westcott-Hort' text, we find 27 quotations taken from the Old Testament. In contrast, there are 70 in the Gospel of St. Mark, 109 in St. Luke, and 124 in St. Matthew. In spite of this, many scholars find a strong link between the Gospel of St. John and the Old Testament since the picture he draws of the Lord Jesus Christ is consistent and typical with that presented in the Old Testament: both present the Lord as the Messiah, the suffering slave, the King of Israel, and the Prophet².

Donald Guthrie³ reports that the great emphasis put on the extent to which Hellenism has affected the Gospel of St. John has hampered the study of the Old Testament in the light of St. John's Gospel. Actually, St. John presents the Lord Jesus Christ as part of Jewish history; and that when the Jews rejected Him they were really rejecting Someone related to them: 'He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him,' (1:11). The Lord went to the Temple and practiced his rightful authority 'when He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen...' (2:15). Nicodemus who was a ruler of the Jews knew the rights of the Lord as a Teacher (3:12). The Lord considered Himself as one of the Jews who had the promise of salvation. Accordingly, He tells the Samaritan woman: "...we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews," (4:22).

Some scholars find that the Old Testament is of paramount importance and influence on this Book, especially the Books of Genesis and Exodus, as St. John moves from the letter of the word to the Spirit of the word; and from the shadow and symbol to the Truth:

1- The Book of Genesis opens by speaking about **God as the Creator** who has conceived the whole world out of His love for mankind. The Gospel of St. John opens by speaking about the Word of God (the 'Logos') through Whom everything came into being. He is the Creator and the Renovator of creation, He enlightens every person with His brilliance.

2- St. John underlines **the struggle between the Lord and Satan** who has murdered people since the beginning of time (Gen 3; Jn 8:44). The Lord has granted us victory over Satan, as He says: "now the ruler of this world will be cast out (12:31). For He has come Who is born of a woman and Who shall bruise the serpent's head (Gen 3:15).

3- In the Book of Exodus, **the Ark of the Tabernacle represents a sanctuary** in which God lived in the middle of His people. St. John's Gospel comes to claim the glory of the Son of God incarnated and dwelling among us (1:14).

4- **The healing bronze serpent** (Num 21:4-9), is a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior (Jn 3:14).

5- **The heavenly manna** (Ex 16), is a symbol of the sacrificial Body of the Lord (6:25-58).

6- **The water from the rock** (Ex 17:1-7), is a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ who says: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink," (7:37).

² F.M. Braum: *Jean le Theologien, t. 11, Les Grandes Traditions D'Israel, 1964*

³ Guthrie, p.237

7- **The pillar of fire** that served for light to them (Ex 13:21-22), points to His words: "I am the Light of the world" (8:12; 12:35).

8- In Exodus, God reveals Himself to Moses and says: "I AM" or "I AM WHO I AM" (3:14). The Lord Jesus Christ ascertains more than once in St. John's Gospel and says: "I am He."

9- The **Passover** occupies a central place in the Book of Exodus (Ch 12). During the Passover, the Israelites crossed from Egypt and out of slavery to flee towards the Promised Land. The Gospel of St. John comes to reveal to us the real Passover: it is our crossing away from this world and going to the Father (13:1, 16:28).

The Evangelist mentions the three Feasts of the Passover that were celebrated during the Lord's service on earth. If he had not mentioned them, we would not have been able to know that the Lord had lived for about three years and a half after the thirty years preceding His baptism.

* At the first feast (2:13 etc..), The Lord **cleaned the Temple**, and in doing so proclaimed His zeal for it. He ascertained to the Jews that He would rebuild a new Temple in three days- through the resurrection of the temple of His Body.

* At the second feast (6:4 etc...), the Lord announced **the offering of His sacrificial Body** as the true Bread granting eternal life.

* At the third feast (12; 31), the hour had come for His glorification as **He rose on the Cross**, thereby granting His believers eternal life.

10- The Lord gives **new meanings to the Old Testament**: the Jews, according to the Old Testament, proudly maintained to be the children of Abraham who was given the promise. They proclaimed that they observed the law - especially by observing the Sabbath. The Lord clarified to them that He is the Only Begotten Son and Giver of true adoption: He is the Lord of the Sabbath! He indicates to them that they are not Abraham's children, but the devil's because of their denial of Him and of their desire to kill Him. They did not observe the Sabbath, and even Moses would accuse them to the Father (5:45).

11- **The Lord Jesus Christ urges the Jews to read the Old Testament** so that they would realize that it testifies for Him. He tells them: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life," (5:39, 40). He underlines that anyone who believes in Moses, believes in Him, for Moses has written about Him (5:36). By saying so, the Lord clearly explains the continuity that exists between the Old and the New Testaments.

12- This Gospel underlines clearly that what has been achieved through the Lord Jesus Christ is directly related to our redemption. Besides, it had been predicted fully by the prophets of the Old Testament. For example:

* The victorious entry of the Lord into Jerusalem (12:14).

* His being rejected by the Jews (12:38, 40).

* Not breaking the Lord's legs (19:36).

* Abraham's vision of the day of the Lord and consequent rejoicing (8:56).

* Isaiah's vision of His glory (12:42).

* Isaiah's prophesy about John, the forerunner (1:23).

Guthrie comments as follows: [The Lord's quoting from the Old Testament and the comments of the Gospel of St. John indicate that the whole of the Holy Bible points to the Lord Jesus Christ: He is the fulfillment of the Old, and the Truth that will guide us to interpret the implications of the Gospel¹].

¹ Guthrie, p.238

THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND GNOSTICISM²

By just flipping through the Gospel of St. John, we discover a feature that is totally different from the other Gospels. For while he presents the life of Jesus Christ in Palestine, he also underlines that in the Lord all the prophecies of the Old Testament have been fulfilled. However, and until very recently, scholars considered that the personality of Jesus Christ, according to St. John's exposition of Him in this Gospel, is more compatible within a Hellenic and Gnostic setting than with the way the Lord is depicted in the other Gospels. This opinion is being rejected by many scholars, as we shall observe later on in this work.

Some critics have maintained that Gnosticism, with its focus on **inner knowledge** as the road to salvation, has affected the writer of this Gospel. Yet Gnosticism appeared in the Second Century after Christ, whereas the Gospel of St. John had been written at the end of the First Century. Some may argue that the roots of Gnosticism are to be found in the earliest stages of paganism and even in Jewish times; and that some Christians in some way or other had accepted it since the First Century.

* In any case, the Gospel of St. John battles Gnostic ideas as they deny the humanity and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Jn 19:34, a soldier pierces the side of the Lord with a spear and blood and water immediately flow out. What else could this be but an instance of His humanity? St. John accordingly says: "And the Word became flesh," (Jn 1:14). In St. John's First Letter (4:2-4), and in the Second Letter (v. 4), he says that those who do not confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh are deceivers and are not of God.

Some scholars claim that we do not find in this Gospel the same Lord Jesus Christ that we find in the other Gospels that relate the parables and simple instructive behavioral teachings. Rather, St. John's Gospel presents symbols and specific definitions, such as: "I am the Bread", "I am the Light", "The Door", "The Shepherd", "The Truth", "The Life", "The Way", and "The Vine." We also find names such as 'The Logos', 'the Truth', and 'Knowledge.' Note also the use of antithesis, such as: the light and darkness, truth and falsehood, the spirit and the body.... All this has driven scholars to say that the Jesus depicted in this Gospel seems to be moving in a Hellenic world in the Second Century. Other scholars add that the writer believes in Gnosticism.

It is true that the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel of St. John, presents Himself repeatedly in awesome sacred expressions: "I AM HE." He came into a dark world that hates the light; he came into a world of falsehoods as of being the Truth; into a world of hatred and enmity while He is Love Himself. By His coming, He distinguishes between two categories of men: one that accepts the Light and another that flees from the Light. The first category believes in the Truth, while the other rejects It. Yet this thought is different than the duality found in Gnosticism. Indeed, the Gospel of St. John does not present a specific teaching concerning the origin of truth or that of evil; and that is what precisely occupied the Gnostics.

These studies could have constituted an obstacle as they seem to arouse doubts in some of the simple-minded concerning the validity of this Gospel and whether St. John the Evangelist is the writer. However, two important discoveries were made around the year 1947 whereby the Lord willed to transform these studies into factors that would strengthen believers all the more.

First: **The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls** or the scrolls of Qumran: these have presented the world with a library about **the sect of the Essenes**. They document a

² *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 416-7 *The Anchor Bible: R.E. Brown: The Gospel According to John (1-XII)*, 1981, p. XLIII, LII, LXV.

period of time between 140 B.C. and 68 A.D. These writings reveal that the thoughts and expressions used in the Gospel of St. John are typically Palestinian and reflect the First Century after Christ.

Secondly: The discovery of **a complete Gnostic library in the region of Naga Hamadi in Upper Egypt**. This offers to the world, and for the first time ever, Gnosticism in its principal origins. Previously, we were gaining information about this subject from the writings of the fathers who opposed this school of thought. We had heard about the names of books without finding complete editions. Today, this discovery has provided us with information that reveals the vast disparity between the world of Gnosticism and the Gospel of St. John; besides indicating the definite differences between them. There is no longer any doubt that this Gospel does not depend on Gnostic sources. Indeed, it has been revealed that any words that were thought to have Gnostic origins are actually pure Jewish and Palestinian words that were in common usage in the First Century after Christ.

Some scholars, such as Braun, Barret, and Quispel have made comparative studies between the Gospel of St. John and the Gnostic manuscripts found in Naga Hamadi. Examples of these manuscripts are: 'The Gospel of Truth' (dating back to 140 A.D.), and 'The Gospel of Thomas.' They compared the ideas and expressions and came to the following conclusions:

1- **It is impossible to place the Gospel of St. John among the Gnostic writings** that have been found in Naga Hamadi. But it is possible to say that the Gnostics have made use of the Gospel of St. John in their writings during the Second Century A.D.; and that they have presented ideas not found in this Gospel.

2- There are strong distinctions between the Gospel and these manuscripts in **the content of thoughts as well as expressions**.

3- There are some expressions that are shared in both writings, yet the Gospel uses them in a specific way while the Gnostics have used them with different implications and for completely different purposes.

The above explains the relationship between St. John's Gospel and the writings of Christian Gnostics or heretics. Yet, we may ask: "Is it possible that this Gospel has opened the door to Gnosticism?" or "Has it prepared the way for it?"

* Some scholars find that the Gnostics could have been influenced by Judaism as they misunderstood some of the texts of the Old Testament and not because of St. John's Gospel. This Gospel has distinguished between light and darkness, yet it has not presented an ideology concerning the source of either of them.

* The Gospel of St. John focuses on **'faith'** and considers 'knowledge' to be a **'divine gift'** granted through a divine revelation. This is an issue that contradicts Gnostic thought.

THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND HELLENISM

St. John has been accused - or the writer of this Gospel - of divesting Christianity with a Hellenic character for the purpose of attracting the Hellenic mind. As proof, they cite his use of the term **'the Word' or 'the Logos'** as a borrowing from Greek philosophy.

The answer to the above is that St. John does not use this term in the same way as it used by Hellenic or Gnostic philosophers; or as used by Philon - a Jew from Alexandria who presented Jewish thought in a symbolic Hellenistic style. St. John gives the term a scriptural meaning that can be understood in the light of the Old Testament and its teachings about 'Wisdom.' It is Wisdom that has come to mankind to transform them into houses of God, and as the Book of Proverbs says:

“Wisdom calls aloud outside; she raises her voice in the open squares;
“Wisdom has built a house, she has sewn her seven pillars,” (9:1).
‘The Word’ in Hellenic thought represents the governing mind inherent in the creation: it is the first newborn creature. In contrast, St. John speaks about ‘the Logos’ as God’s own utterance. The Logos is the Only Son: He is of God and resides with Him. He does not exist outside God for He is indeed one with Him in essence. In Hellenic thought, we do not find the expression ‘the Word of God incarnate dwells among men for He proclaims to them His divine mysteries.’ There is then a distinction between ‘the Word’ as used by Hellenic scholars and ‘The Word’ according to the Bible.

If we study carefully the ‘**LOGOS**’ according to St. John’s proclamation in his Gospel, we will find that It is equated with ‘wisdom’ as per the teachings in the Old Testament:

A- **Eternal:** (Prov 8:22; Sirach 24:9; Ws 9:5). [Read Jn 1:1].

B- **Seated in Heaven,** He descends to the earth, to live in the midst of Israel (Prov 8:31; Baruch 3:37; Si 14:8). [Read Jn 1:14; 3:41; 6:38; 16:28].

C- **A bounty of the glory of the Most High:** (Ws 7:25); [Jn1:14; 8:15; 11:4; 17:5].

D- **Teaching the divine mysteries to man:** (Ws 9:16); and all that pleases God (Ws 8:4); leading people to Life (Prov 8:25; Si 4:12). [Jn 3:19; 7:40; 14:19]

E- **Uses the voice of the speaker “I”** (Prov 8; Si 24)

F- **Calls man and appears to him** (Prov 8:1; Ws 6:16); [Jn 5:14; 9:35;]. He calls His disciples “My children” (Prov 8:23; Si 6:18), [Jn 13:33].

THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

It is regrettable that many critics have recently become exceedingly engaged in researching the extent to which this Gospel is marked by Hellenic thought, language, and culture. This has led some to believe that the writer could never have been a Jew! However, the study of this Gospel exposes the writer’s relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the character of the Evangelist: St. John is preoccupied with revealing the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ.

First: As the King of the Jews: He is the spiritual King, the Messiah that the prophets awaited, and the One Who preoccupied the people of the Old Testament.

“Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (Jn1:49).

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (12:13).

- Pilate...said to Him: “Are You the King of the Jews...Are you a king then?” Jesus answered: “You say rightly that I am a king...” (18:33-37).

“Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.” (19:12).

“Shall I crucify your King?” (19:15).

- And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS (19:19).

Secondly: The Gospel affirms repeatedly 21 times that the **Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah**. This is in contrast to 19 times in the Gospel of St. Matthew. Indeed, the words spoken by the Lord, as well as His acts, all fulfill the Messianic hope¹ to the people of God:

* He came to purify His Temple in Jerusalem (2:13-22).

* He is the One “...of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets, wrote...” (1:45; Deut 18:18).

* In Him, the words of the prophet Isaiah were fulfilled (6, 35:5), when He opened the eyes of the blind (9:6); and made the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk, etc...

¹ Nelson: *A New Catholic Commentary on the Holy Scripture*, 1969, p1023.

- * The Giver of freedom (Jn 8:36; Is 61:1).
- * The true Light that shines on those sitting in darkness (Jn1:5; 9; 8:12; 12:46; Is 9:1; 60:1).
- * The Source of Living Water given to quench the thirst of His people (7:37 etc.; Ch 4; Ex17:1-7; Is 55:1; 58:11).
- * The Shepherd King who personally cares for His people (??Jn 10; Ez 34).
- * The Judge of the living and the dead, and this is a Jewish title used distinctively for God (Jn 11).
- * The Gospel, in its entirety, almost repeats the words of the Samaritan woman: “I know that a Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ)...Could this be the Christ?” (4:25, 29).

Third: This Gospel is characterized by the claim of the Lord Himself: “**I AM He**” with which He presents Himself to mankind. In the Old Testament, “I am He” indicates the One God, the Maker, and the Savior (Ex 3:14; 10:2; Is 42:8; 43:10-11; Ex6:7). That explains why the words of the Lord are repeated in this Gospel: “**I AM He**” proclaims the nature of God as the Source of Salvation:

- “I am the Bread of Life,” (6:35).
- “I am the Light of the world,” (8:12; 9:5).
- “I am One who bears witness of Myself,” (8:18).
- “I am the Door of the sheep,” (10:7).
- “I am the Good Shepherd,” (10:11, 14).
- “I am the true Vine,” (15:1, 5).
- “I am a King,” (18:37).

Fourth: The principle theme running from the beginning to the end of this Gospel is the presentation of the Lord as the Kingdom in itself: note that the Kingdom has been mentioned twice only (3:3-5; 18:36). Yet He is revealed through our delight in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who is our eternal Kingdom.

- “...that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life,” (6:40).
- “... No one comes to the Father except through Me,” (14:6).
- “... He who has seen Me has seen the Father...,” (14:9 etc.).

This clear theme that runs throughout this Gospel has also been presented in the other Gospels. It is the ultimate outcome and conclusion that people reached towards the final days that the Lord Jesus Christ spent on earth.

Fifth: The Lord Jesus Christ is not presented as a lawgiver setting forth laws or rites. Rather, He is presented in Person as the mystery of life. He is ‘Life’ - (14:6; 1:4). He announces to His flock the mystery of His coming to earth: “...I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly,” (10:10). “...Because I live, you will live also” (14:19). The Lord affirms to Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life,” (11:25). He came to graft us onto Him and be branches in His Vine, thereby carrying His life within us (15:1-8).

Our delight in the Lord Jesus Christ - ‘**the life**’ - is achieved through the complete change that touches our nature during the mystery of Baptism - (3:3-8), our unity and steadfastness in Him through the mystery of the Eucharist - (6:52-58), and receiving remission of our sins continuously through the mystery of Repentance - (20:23). All these have been fulfilled by the power of the Cross and the blessings of His Blood.

Sixth: In each chapter, St. John presents to us a certain aspect of the nature of the Lord that grants us salvation and fulfills all our needs.

- * By reading the Gospel of St. John, we get to understand the Lord from the perspective of His divinity: the Creator of all; and from the perspective of His

incarnation: He came to reform the fallen creation¹.

St. Augustine

WHO IS JESUS?

Jn.1: The Divine Word Incarnated, Grantor of divine adoption.

Jn.2: The Son of Man with Divine Power, who gives joy and renewal of our souls.

Jn.3: The divine and able Teacher, the Giver of the new birth.

Jn.4: The amazing Winner of souls.

Jn.5: The great Physician

Jn.6: The Bread of Life.

Jn.7: The Living Water.

Jn.8: The Light of the World.

Jn.9: The Giver of Insight.

Jn.10: The Good Shepherd.

Jn.11: The Giver of Life and Resurrection.

Jn.12: The King of Israel.

Jn.13: The Washer of feet.

Jn.14: The heavenly Comforter.

Jn.15: The true Vine.

Jn.16: The Dispatcher of the Holy Spirit.

Jn.17: The great High Priest.

Jn.18: The suffering Messiah.

Jn.19: The rejected King.

Jn.20: The Conqueror of death.

Jn.21: The Lifter of fallen souls and their Promoter into heaven.

* Do not be in doubt - in your understanding of the mystery of the Trinity- that you are doing anything beyond man's capacity. St. John, the Evangelist, did just that: for he soared beyond the flesh, beyond the earth that he walked upon, beyond the seas that he saw, beyond the air where birds fly, beyond the sun and moon and stars, beyond all the intangible spirits, and beyond his own mind. He did so with his own reasoning mind, and sublimated and spilled himself above and beyond all this, high up wherever He may be found².

St. Augustine

THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE FATHER

Since the Lord Jesus Christ is the focus of this Gospel, the Evangelist affirms that He is the Eternal Word of God. He came to reveal Himself to us and to accomplish the messianic and redeeming offering on our behalf - (20:47), granting us life- (10:10), since He is from above and above all- (3:3). At the same time, the Evangelist **affirms the role of the Father** in order to save us from falling into the error committed by the Gnostics. Hence the only Son is with the Father, and He is the Word and the Son at the same time, Who has been sent by the Father- (5:36; 6:57; 11:42; 20:21). He came to proclaim the words of the Father (3:34; 6:29; 17:3); and to perform His work- (10:36) He who sees Him sees the Father, and he who believes in Him perceives the Father- (5:23 etc; 12:44 etc; 14:9).

Therefore this Book is the Gospel of the Messiah: The Messiah is the Word of God and the Redeemer. Consequently, the Messiah is one with His Father, fulfilling the

¹ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67:1.*

² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 20:13.*

Father's will that is at the same time in harmony with His own. This is what we shall notice more clearly as we proceed with our study.

* St. John is like an eagle soaring upwards and reaching the Father Himself. He says: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God- (1)...**The chaste writer explains mysteries that married people could not handle¹.

St. Jerome

ST JOHN AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Some name this Gospel **“The Gospel of the Holy Spirit.”** Throughout this Book, the issue of the Holy Spirit is clearly and powerfully raised.

In the discussion between the Lord Jesus Christ and Nicodemus, the Lord speaks about the role of the Holy Spirit in the new birth (Ch 3). The Lord clarifies the difference between natural birth (physical) and spiritual birth. It was hard even on the Jewish teacher Nicodemus to understand the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the Lord presented to him a tangible example; He likened the Spirit to “the wind that blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (3:8).

The discourse of the Lord in this passage about the birth granted by the Holy Spirit is considered one of the principal signposts of the Gospel of St. John. It is in harmony with the rest of this Book, for we will be able to comprehend the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ only through our grasp of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this will enable us to worship God in spirit and in truth (4:24). This is possible through the Spirit of God Who lives within us and not due to our own ability.

The Lord saw the crowds, celebrating the feast and practicing its rites, without feeling any inner spiritual fulfillment. Consequently, He stood up on the last day of the feast and promised to offer the Holy Spirit as the living water springing within the believers (7:37-39).

In His farewell speech - Ch.14-17), the Lord could offer nothing else to comfort His disciples but the promise of the Holy Spirit. He is the Comforter- the Paraclete- that the Lord grants to His Church in order to affect and shape it constantly and ultimately transforms her into the image of her Groom:

* For He is Her Advocate [this is the literal translation of the Greek word: the Paraclete]. He is the Spirit of Truth that bears witness to the Lord. He does so not through mere theoretical words but through His power to shape our nature into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ and His likeness.

* The Holy Spirit is the speaker as the glorious Lord Jesus is no longer present in the flesh (since He has risen to heaven). He teaches, leads, and guides the disciples the truth, and bears witness through them (14:26; 16:13etc).

* He is the Comforter- (16:6 etc...) as we carry the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE CHURCH

Many scholars consider that the earlier holy Gospels have been written for the world - whether the people are Jewish, Roman, or Greek- in order to acquaint them with the Lord Jesus Christ as a spiritual King, a true Servant, and the unique friend of all mankind. Consequently, all would believe in Him, and enjoy His redeeming work. Ultimately, they would rise from being slaves to become sons of God. As for the

¹ *Against Jovinianus, 1:26*

Gospel of St. John, these scholars consider that it has been written specifically for the Church and therefore it has been called '**The Gospel of the Church**': it presents to us '**the Christ of the Church**', even though St. John does not use the term 'church.' The principal theological premise here is to establish a link between the historical Jesus as He appeared to be in His life on earth and the Christ of the Church Who is ever-present and works within Her. In other words, since the Lord Jesus Christ who is 'the incarnate Word of God' is central to the Gospel, then His Church- with Her ministry and worship, including specifically the holy mysteries- holds a principal position in His favor. St. John therefore discusses the following points:

1- **The mission of the Church** (Jn.4:31 etc; 12:20 etc.).

2- **Her offering of worship 'in spirit and in truth.'** He strips the Temple in Jerusalem of its glory in order to proclaim it - through the Church - of the crucified Lord resurrected from the dead (1:14, 51; 2:13 etc, 4:19 etc).

3- **Regarding the holy mysteries of the Church:** We find that St. John puts special emphasis on the mysteries of the Church such as **Baptism, the Eucharist, and the Priesthood:**

* The Evangelist presents **the baptism of John** as a testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ -(1:8) and a preparatory road to His baptism by the Holy Spirit (1:15; 25:23).

* At the wedding in Cana (2:1-12) The transformation of the water used by the Jews for purification into wine is a Messianic sign that His hour had come (2:4); and probably points to the Eucharist too.

* The Lord spoke clearly to Nicodemus about the mystery of Baptism (3:1-7).

* The Evangelist speaks clearly about **the Eucharist** (6:22-50). This is also referred to in the event of the feeding of the crowds (6:1-13). Here we see the Lord as He **satisfies believers through the mystery of the Eucharist offered in His Church.**

* The mystery of Baptism is also referred to in the healing of the lame man of Bethesda (5:1-14), since human nature is healed. Also in the event of opening the eyes of the blind man (9:1-7) by washing him in the pool of Siloam that means the one dispatched or sent forth.

* The Blood and Water flowing from the side of the crucified Lord (19:34) indicates the unity of the two mysteries: Baptism and the Eucharist, and the way they complement each other.

* He speaks about the **mystery of Priesthood** (20:22-23).

4- In the earlier Gospels, mankind is divided into good and evil; whereas in this Gospel the Evangelist writes about '**Christ of the Church**' and makes a distinction between believers and non- believers. In believing, we are not judged (3:18) and we are granted eternal life (3:36). Moreover, we move from death to life. However, it should not be mere theoretical belief (13:34,35), but a living faith coupled with love and observation of God's commandments (21:114-24).

5- **The promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit in the farewell words of the Lord** as the Spirit would be the Comforter of the Church, Her Intercessor, and Leader (Ch 14-17).

6- **The Lord Jesus Christ presents Himself repeatedly as 'I AM'** since He is the focus of life, glory, and hope in the life to come. In the same way, He is now the focus of His present Church.

THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE CHURCH

As this Gospel has been written for the churches found all over the world, it bears the thought of the "**Universal Church.**" It is, therefore, not directed solely to the Jews. This line of thought is clear throughout this Gospel. We may quote a few examples:

1- The Gospel of St. John presents the Lord Jesus Christ as:

“The Lamb of God who takes away **the sins of the world,**” (1:29).

‘That was the true Light which gives light to **every man** who comes into the world’ (1:9)

‘But **as many as received him,** to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name,’ (1:12).

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life,” (3:16).

“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, **will draw all peoples to Myself,**” (12:32).

‘...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,**’ (11:51,52).

“ And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that **everyone who sees the Son** and believes in Him may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up in the last day,” (6:40).

“And other sheep I have **which are not of this fold;** them also must I bring, and they will hear My voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd,” (10:16).

“ I do not pray for these alone but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they **all** may be one,”(17:20,21).

“... Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,” (20:29).

2- The Universality of the Church became evident due to rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Jewish people: They turned their backs to their Redeemer and sought to kill Him (4:3, 44; 7:1-8; 11:7-16). Jerusalem had become the capital of Israel and the city of the Messiah (12; 12-19). That city was marked by turmoil (1:19 etc.; 5:23). The Lord abandoned the Temple (8:59), and moved away from the walls of the city as He headed towards Golgotha,(19:17).

3- ‘The Temple of Jerusalem’ is replaced by His Father’s house- (2:12), full of glory- (12:14), from where redemption is granted- (4:22). The Lord proclaims the glory of the **Temple of His Body-** (2:20 etc) that offers a mystery of resurrection to all mankind.

4- The heretic city of ‘Samaria’ is transformed into a place of worship in spirit and in truth (4:23etc...).

5- The whitened fields that are ready for the harvest point to the harvest of future times and are symbolic of the non-Jewish world.

6- Because the Evangelist is writing to all peoples- even the non-Jews- he interprets the words: Rabbi- (1:31); Messiah- (1:41); Cephas- (1:42). He also elaborates on the Jewish custom of purification- (2:6), and of burial- (9:40); as well as their relationship with the Samaritans- (4:9); and the Passover as a Jewish feast- (4:6). We find that he also gives a geographical description of Bethesda- (5:2); and the court of Pontius Pilate known in Hebrew as Gabbatha- (19:13)...All this reveals that St. John is writing to speakers who lived in Ephesus and used the Greek language- whether these are of Jewish or Gentile origins. He believes that the universal Church is not confined to the Jewish nation.

THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND ETERNAL LIFE (eschatological life)

The Synoptic Gospels lead the reader towards the Kingdom of God which is anticipated at the end of time and would be fulfilled soon by the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In contrast, St. John the Evangelist affirms that a believer attains eternal life through his everyday life.

This Gospel does not describe the end of time and the end of the world; or the final coming of the Lord to judge the world. Rather, it speaks about eternal life that is achieved through the redeeming work we enjoy when we accept the Cross. Consequently, we taste eternal life through its pledge here on earth; and as we experience its glory by the kind of life we lead here:

* He proclaims the glory of the Lord- (1:14; 2:11; 11:4, 40). This brings the Church to taste the pledge of eternal life where we see the Lord in the fullness of His glory and get acquainted with His mysteries.

* Redemption actually elevates us above time and is a victory over death. It is achieved through active faith, and as the Lord says: “Most assuredly, I say to you, He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from life to death,” (5:24).

* Eternal life becomes a reality for us as we observe the following:

A- The prince of this world has been condemned (3:18, 19).

B- The Evangelist proclaims that the fullness of time has come and that history has been fulfilled at the time the Lord Jesus Christ died on the Cross.

As whoever tastes the Gospel of St. John, truly finds himself elevated to eternal life - through its pledge - and hence he beholds the glorified Lord within his innermost depths, and experiences the real victory over death and over the love of this world. One feels victorious over Satan who subjected the world for a while and who is now bound and driven out as he has no place within us. The cross of the Lord has led us into this living and heavenly experience.

* Don't you realize that it is not without reason that the Evangelist speaks to us from heaven? Notice how from the very beginning he draws our souls and gives them wings and ascends with the minds of his listeners. He holds our hands and leads us above all tangible things, above earth and heaven and above the angels themselves: above the cherubim and seraphim: above the thrones and leaders and authorities - in brief, he leads us on a trip that travels above all creatures¹.

St. John Chrysostom

C.H. Dodd² believes that St. John was trying to correct the intention of the Ecclesiastical and Eschatological thought; and that he, therefore, presented ‘a realized eschatology.’ That means that eschatology is an actual reality and not just a mere future prediction. However, scholars have rejected this as a main premise for the Gospel. Their argument is based on that though some chapters that speak about the life at the end of time as a life that is experienced in the present through its pledge. The Evangelist does not ignore the future life at the end of time (5:25-29), but both paths run side by side³.

THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE MIRACLES

In the Gospels preceding the Gospel of St. John, we find an abundance of miracles performed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Through them, the Lord reveals His divine tenderness and great love for mankind. Although St. John knows about them all, he chooses to relate only seven of them in his Gospel whereby we would accept to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ - some consider he chooses eight of them. He says: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ,

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 2:8.*

² *The Apostolic Teaching and its Development, 1944, p65 ff.*

³ *Cf. L Van Hartingsveld: Gie Eschatologie des Johannesevangeliums, 1963*

the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name,” (20:30,31). “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, that if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written,” (21:25).

It is, therefore, clear that the Lord performed these miracles to lead us to have faith and enjoy eternal life. This is what Nicodemus felt as he said: “...no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him,” (3:2). The Lord also affirms: “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe,” (4:48). He holds these signs as testimony against unbelievers, as He says: “If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin,...” (15:24).

The chief priests and the Pharisees realized how these miracles would affect the life of the people, and so they said: “What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this everyone will believe in Him...,” (11:47,48).

THE MIRACLE	THE MEANING
1- Water turned to wine-2:1-11.	- The renewal of human nature and lending it eternal joy.
2-A nobleman’s son healed- 4:47-54.	- Faith is a prerequisite for eternal life.
3- A man healed at Bethesda- 5:1-9.	- The power of the renewed life.
4- The feeding of the multitude- 6:1-4 ;(Matt 14:13- 21; Mk 6:32-44; Lk 9:10-17).	- Jesus Christ is the living Bread.
5- Walking on the water- 6:15-21 ;(Matt14:22-36; Mk 6:45-56).	- Jesus Christ our leader in the royal path
6- The healing of the man born blind-9:1-14.	- Jesus Christ is the light of life.
7- Lazarus rose from the dead- 11:1-44.	- Jesus Christ is our resurrection and Conqueror of death
8-Catching fish-21:1-14.	- Complete fellowship in the new life.

THE AUTHORITY OF THIS GOSPEL

The universal Church unquestioningly accepted the authority of the Gospel of St. John from the beginning. The testimonies of the Church came even from heretics and heathen groups and these admitted that the writer of this Gospel is St. John ever since the beginning of the Second Century, that is shortly after its writing. Only a few known as the ‘Algi’ group disagreed with this, according to **St. Epiphanius**¹. These opposed the Gospel as it contradicted their belief in the Logos. It is not clear whether the Algi were a group or just one person. At any rate, they did not have an audience among the public or in the Church.

FIRST: THE TESTIMONY OF THE CHURCH AND THE HERETICS

The Gospel of St. John was found among the Old Greek manuscripts that contained the New Testament, such as the Sinai and the Vatican versions. These had been written from versions that were even older than them. They were similar to manuscripts of the New Testament that had been translated before and could date back to manuscripts written in the Second or Third Centuries, just as the Syrian or Latin ones that included this Gospel. As for the testimony of the **first Fathers of the Church**, we do not hear anyone voice having any doubts concerning the author or any suspicion that someone other than St. John has written this Gospel. We mention the

¹ *Adv. Haer.2: 31.*

following as examples:

* **St. Ireneaus, Bishop of Lyon in the Second Century:** he based his case against the Gnostics on the Gospel of St. John. He testifies that the authorized versions are four. He also testifies that St. John published his Gospel in Ephesus¹.

* Some fathers have borrowed certain expressions directly from this Gospel, or have used them without referring to the source. This is found in the following: the **Epistle of Barnabas; the Book of the Shepherd by Hermes; in the writings of Papias; Clement the Roman; St. Justin, the martyr; Theophilus of Antioch; St. Ignatius of Antioch; St. Polycarp; Tertulian, the scholar; Origen; and St. Clement of Alexandria.**

*The testimony contained in the Muratorian Canon, in the Second Century-170-200A.D. approx.-is powerful in its statement that the writer of this Book is St. John.

* **Tatian**, the disciple of St. Justin, borrowed much from this Gospel, and began his work entitled 'Diatessaron' with the same introduction as that of St. John's Gospel.

*Many heretics borrowed from St. John's Gospel, such as Heraclion and his teacher Valentinus besides Basilides-in 120A.D. Moreover, Gnostic writings- such as the Gospel of Truth- borrowed from this Gospel.

SECOND: THE TESTIMONY OF THE HEATHEN

The heathen philosopher Salsas, an enemy of Christianity, borrowed from this Gospel the material he used to write his book against Christianity and to attack the four Gospels around the year 178A.D. He mentions details that have been written only in the Gospel of St. John.

OPPOSITION TO THE AUTHENTICITY OF ST JOHN AS THE WRITER

Many scholars and critics have discussed the validity of the authorship of St. John, the son of Zebedee. They have presented numerous and complicated theories. Some have attempted to consider that it has been produced by the apostolic Church and not as the work of one person. Some suggested that its form indicates it was written in the Second Century. This could be due to possible links they saw between the Gospel and Gnosticism, as we have pointed out earlier. Others have tried to confirm that the writer is a non-Jew.

E Haenchen presents a summary of the critical problems relevant to this matter and covers the period from 1929 to the fifties².

The following is a summary of the response to those who deny the authority of St. John as the writer of this Gospel:

CLUES IN THE GOSPEL THAT REVEAL THE CHARACTER OF THE WRITER

Although the Evangelist has not mentioned his own name in this Gospel, yet he has included clues to his character through which we are able to recognize him. These are:

A- HE IS AN EYE-WITNESS

In the introduction of the Gospel, the Evangelist says: "We saw His glory," (1:14). Some have tried to interpret the plural term 'we saw' as an intention to convey 'all Christians', and does not refer to the writer. Hence the term alludes to a spiritual rather than a material meaning. In this way, the writer of the Gospel is 'The Apostolic

¹ *Adv. Haer, 3:1:1*

² *Theologische Rundschau, n.f., 1955, p. 295-335*

Church' and not a witness¹. Many scholars do not accept this line of thought especially that the verb, used in the Greek context means physical sight and not spiritual sight. Even if it were interpreted as spiritual vision², St. John confirms in more than one place that he is a witness who is reporting the truth:

'And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows he is telling the truth, so that you may believe,' (19:35).

"This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true," (21:34).

It is clear that the writer is a **'disciple'** and an **'eye witness'**: this is relevant to St. John who writes in the same style in the introduction of his First Epistle: **" That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life...the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life....,"(1Jn1).**

B- THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

One of the indications incorporated within the Gospel itself, and pointing to St. John as the writer, is the title he humbly gives himself without mentioning his name: '...the disciple whom Jesus loved,' (21:20; 19:26). Some modern critics have attempted to raise suspicion concerning that issue but have differed on defining the identity of that disciple. They claimed he is:

- 1- **The rich youth** who, it is reported, Jesus looking at him, loved him (Mk10:21). Yet we have nothing in the Bible or in tradition to prove that the youth returned and believed after he had left the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore this opinion is of no value.
- 2- **Nathaniel**: the response to that is that we know very little about him. Moreover, when the Evangelist speaks of him he mentions him by name (21:2), while in that same chapter we get the words: 'the disciple whom Jesus loved....' (21:20). Therefore the last words are intended to distinguish him from Nathaniel
- 3- **Lazarus**³: as the sisters had sent for the Lord saying: "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick," (11:3). The response to that is that Lazarus was not with the Lord in the 'upper room' when he would have leaned on His chest and for the verse to be relevant which says: '... Peter...saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper...' (21:20). It is clear from the three other Gospels that the Lord Jesus Christ was solely with His disciples during the last supper. Moreover, the Evangelist repeats the name of Lazarus in chapters 11 and 12, so why would he hide his name after that?!
- 4- Some believe that this title does not indicate a specific person but carries a symbolic significance. In this way, the writer of this Gospel could be the Church as an entire entity and not as one person. This thought is not satisfactory and hard to accept for it denies that disciple any historic place as an eyewitness; and this is contradictory to all that is reported about him in this Gospel⁴.

The above exposes the different conflicting opinions. As for positive indications that St. John is the disciple whom Jesus loved, they are the following:

- 1- Ever since the Second Century, the writings of the church fathers speak about the disciple whom Jesus loved and identify him to be John, the son of Zebedee. To them,

¹ C.K.Barett: *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1956, p.138

² Guthrie, p.242.

³ J.N.Senders defended this opinion in many works, including: B.A.Mastin: *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1986. This was followed by F.V.Fison, and E.F.Harrison

⁴ Cf. Correll: *Consummatum Est*, 1958, p.204 ff.

St. John is the writer and this was a matter they did not question. M.F.Miles¹ notes that **Origen, and St. John Chrysostom** have found in the description: ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ the key that reveals the object of this Gospel.

2- He is one of the Lord’s disciples according to the testimony of the Gospel of St. John and in which he is referred to as ‘the disciple’ - (21:20). This is further underlined by the indication that he leaned on the Lord’s chest during the last supper (21:20)

3- Some scholars find that St. John is one of three disciples who were close to the Lord, and who accompanied Him on many occasions when the rest of the disciples were absent². When St. James was martyred in the year 44 A.D., St. Peter and St. John were still alive: for we are told that both were together in Jn 20:2. Therefore this could be no other but St. John.

4- St. John is mentioned by name in the other Gospels: twice in Matthew’s, nine times in St. Mark’s, and six times in St. Luke’s. In St. John’s Gospel, however, he is never mentioned by name. It is evident that the writer is St. John and that he refrained from giving his name due to his humility.

5- This disciple was very close to St. Peter as we are told in (21:7; 20:2). The only time St. John appears without St. Peter is when the Lord, from His Cross, entrusted him with the Virgin Mother to be his own (19:26). So who is that disciple who always accompanied St. Peter? There is no doubt that it was St. John the son of Zebedee since he was with him and with James, while the other disciples were absent, on many occasions and as we have mentioned earlier (review Mk 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). The Lord appointed these three to prepare the Passover for Him (Lk 22:8). They were together even after the Lord’s resurrection (Acts 3:1; 4:13). They are mentioned in Acts 8:14 as the ones delegated to go from Jerusalem to Samaria. When St. Paul speaks about the pillars of the Church, he mentions James, Cephas (Peter), and John (Gal 2:9). All this indicates that this is St. John: the disciple whom Jesus loved and who was St. Peter’s companion.

6- Some scholars note that when St. John the Baptist is mentioned in this Gospel his name is just mentioned as ‘John ’without any title attached to it. This strongly supports the ecclesiastical concept that the writer is St. John the son of Zebedee who insisted on not mentioning his own name in this Gospel: he found that there was no need to make a distinction between himself and St. John the Baptist by including a specific title.

C-THE PALESTINIAN BACKGROUND

Some wonder if the Gospel, having been written by St. John the son of Zebedee, bears any proof that the writer is a Jew who had lived in Jerusalem? And was he an eyewitness of the Lord? Or was he a Second Century man from Antioch or Alexandria?

Scholars respond that this Gospel includes many indications and testimonies that prove that the writer lived in Palestine in the First Century, and that he was a Jew. For example:

1- His knowledge of Jewish customs and traditions

He often presents accurate details about the Jewish way of life and traditions during the period prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, such as:

* The rites of purification [2:6].

*The rites of the Feast of the Tabernacles [7:37; 8:12(the Enlightening)].

¹ M.F.Miles: *The Spiritual Gospel*, 1960, p.9 ff.

² Review our commentary in this study about the character of St. John

- * The rites of purification for the Feast of the Passover [18:28; 19:31-42].
- * The teachings of the Jews governing their lives, such as the law governing the observation of the Sabbath [5:10; 7:21-9:14, 23, et...].
- * His knowledge about the anticipation of the Jews for a prophet with the spirit of Elijah [1:19-27]; and their understanding that Christ, the Messiah, 'remains forever' [12:34].

2- His knowledge of Jewish history

The writer knows exactly the years it took to build the Temple (2:20). He knows about the enmity that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans (4:9). He also knows that the high priest at the time of the Lord's crucifixion is the same Caiaphas and that his father in law was Annas (18:13; 11:49; etc..)

3- His knowledge of Palestine's geography

The writer has accurate knowledge of Palestine: he knows the Hebrew name for the Pool near the Sheep Gate and that it has five porches. He knows that there are two villages named 'Bethany' (12:1; 28:1). He speaks about the spring of 'Aenon' near Salim (3:23); and says that the Sea of Galilee is the Sea of Tiberias (4:21). Moreover, he indicates that the city of Ephraim is close to the wilderness (11:54).

4- He retained the style of the Hebrew language

Although St. John has written his Gospel in Greek, yet it bears the style of the Hebrew language. This is due to the difficulty faced by a writer using a language other than his own native one. This feature appears in the terms and the expressions he uses, as well as in his emphasis on figures.

5- He incorporates details not mentioned in the other three Gospels: these could not have been included by anyone unless he has been an eyewitness and is acquainted with the people and their names, for example:

- * The detailed report about Nicodemus (Ch3).
- * The report about Mary and Martha (Ch 11).
- * The incident with Malchus (18:10).
- * The report about Annas and Caiaphas (18:19-32)
- * The report about the women at the Lord's tomb (20:15-17).
- * The report about the Lord's delivery of His mother to St. John's care while He was on the Cross (19:27).
- * The report about St. Peter and John himself after the Resurrection (21:5-23).

St. John also records fine details about events that can be presented only by an eyewitness. For example: he states that there were six water-pots (2:6); the distance the disciples had rowed away from the coast was two hundred cubits approximately (21:8); and the number of fishes they caught was fifty three, (21:11). He also mentions that the loaves were made of barley (6:9); that the odor of the oil of spikenard filled the house (12:3); the emotions of the officers when the Lord was arrested (18:); and the weight of the spices used for the Lord's body (19:39). Note also the accurate description of the reactions of the disciples (2:11 etc..; 4:27; 6:19; 12:16; 13:22; etc...); and the Lord's sympathy and reaction (13:1.61??; 6:15, 24; 2:11).

The above examples and many other details confirm that St. John is an eyewitness to all he has written in his Gospel.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN, THE FISHERMAN

Some scholars refuse to recognize that St. John is the writer of this Gospel. They validate their stand by saying: **'Is it logical to believe that an illiterate fisherman can write such a Gospel while we consider it to be better than anything that Sufi philosophers have ever written? This is a kind of unparalleled and unforced**

fluency that is awesome?’

The response to this is the following:

First: Even if the disciple were illiterate, yet we believe that the entire Holy Bible has been inspired by the Holy Spirit (2Peter1:21). Hence, even though the human element is instrumental yet the Holy Spirit sanctifies, elevates, and grants it tremendous power. He also embraces the human being to shield him/her from committing any fault.

Second: St. John was actually qualified to write this sublime ‘spiritual Gospel’ based on the following:

- 1- He was not illiterate as many claimed. Actually, he was not just a fisherman: he was a merchant who traded in fish and his father had people who worked for him just as any rich man would have at that time. There is a great probability that he enjoyed learning and sought to increase his knowledge. It is a typical custom of the Jews to take up a certain craft such as fishing- and every Jew had a craft-just as Saul of Tarsus practiced the craft of making tents (Acts 18:3).
- 2- We know that the Word of God is offered to all mankind- beginners as well as mature people. This is clear in the words of St. Paul: “...we speak wisdom among those who are mature...” (1 Cor2:6); “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age (Heb 5:14). Just as the three evangelists-Matthew, Mark, and Luke offered the Word of God to the simple people, we may say that St. John was one of three who were very close to the Lord and who were chosen to accompany Him in grave circumstances. These were events that revealed the mystery of His Person and His message. It is this disciple whom Jesus loved and who leaned on His chest - (21:20) - who was to write to the mature. It is as though the first three Gospels represent the invitation to accept the faith and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as the redeeming Messiah, the Servant of mankind, and the divine Friend. As for this Gospel, it represents the complementary education in faith for mature believers. It is the **‘spiritual Gospel’** that is offered to those who have become genuine Christians and hence it elevates them to enjoy the ultimately divine mysteries.

Third: We have commented on the extent to which this Gospel is related to the Old Testament as it underlines that the Lord is the true Lamb of God, and not a Passover symbol, for in Him the prophecies are fulfilled. The discussion between the Lord and the Jews is meant to reveal that He is greater than Abraham and Moses...this agrees with St. John since he is a Jew who perceives the divine mystery. He yearns that every Jew, as well as every Gentile, enjoy the One Who is the ‘subject of the prophecies.’

Fourth: We have also indicated that this Gospel does not contain any kind of Hellenic Gnosticism. A number of scholars had made this claim before the Gnostic library was discovered in Naga Hamadi. The discovered manuscripts that were found and brought to light around 1947, however, reveal that the writings belong to the religious group known the Essenes or monks from the Jewish city of Qumran. The style of St. John is similar to that of these manuscripts and appropriately so since he studied under St. John the Baptist who lived in the wilderness. He learned a lot about them being neighbors. The attitude of the Essenes towards religion was a spiritual, Sophist, mystical, and symbolic one rather than a tangible concept. Their life rotated around the conflict between light and darkness, between truth and falsehood...It is as though St. John came to announce to them that he had found the One Who

would fulfill their heart's desire. He was Someone who would not only lead them to know the light and the truth, but Who would offer Himself to them as the 'true Light' and the 'Truth': through Him we are enlightened and enjoy the Truth!

SYNOPSIS

Scholars have agreed that this Gospel is notable for its detailed and goal-oriented parts. In spite of that, they are not unanimous about the breakdown in itself. For instance, the divisions D. Mollat sets up are that the Gospel, after the introduction, is divided into nine parts according to the liturgies observed for the principal Jewish feasts:

A-The Introduction to the Gospel Ch 1:1 - 18

B-The Nine Parts

- 1- The first week of Messianic service Ch 1:19 - 2:11
- 2- The First Passover Ch 2:12 - Ch 4
- 3- The Sabbath Ch 5
- 4- The Second Passover Ch 6
- 5- The Feast of Tabernacles Ch 7 -Ch 10:21
- 6- The Feast of Dedication Ch10:22 - Ch 11:54
- 7- The Third Passover Ch 11:55 - Ch 19:42
- 8- The Resurrection Ch 20
- 9- The Appearances of the resurrected Jesus Ch 21

However, the most prevalent manner of marking the divisions is the one proposed by A. Feuillet, C.H. Dodd, and R.E. Brown. This consists of two main parts plus an introduction and a conclusion:

A- The Introduction Ch 1:1- 18

B- The Book of Signs Ch 1:19 -Ch12

C-The Book of Suffering Ch 13 -Ch 20

D- The Conclusion Ch 21

Feuillet finds that the Gospel as a whole covers two subjects: the proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ and His submission to suffering until death on account of this proclamation. Based on that, it is possible to divide the Gospel as follows:

The First Book: The Book of Signs

- 1-Establishing a new testament by instituting baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit Ch 1:19 - Ch 4:42
- 2- Revealing Himself: that He is one with God, the Source of life Ch 4:43 -Ch 5:47
- That He is the Bread of Life Ch 6
- That He is the Light of the world Ch 7 -12

The Second Book: The Book of Suffering

- 1- Revealing Himself to His disciples through love, comforting, and oneness Ch 13 - 17
- 2- Suffering is the road taken to establish the Church Ch 18 -Ch 19
- 3- Resurrection and its association with the descent of the Holy Spirit Ch 21, 22

To facilitate the study of this Gospel, we propose the following divisions:

First: The Introduction: The Word Incarnated Ch 1:1-18

Second: Signs and Deeds that reveal His Divinity Ch 1:19-Ch 12

Third: His Revelation of His Identity to His Own Children Ch 13-17

Fourth: The Son of God Sacrificed Ch 18-19

Fifth: His Resurrection Testifies to His Divinity Ch 20

Sixth: The Conclusion Ch 21

AN INSPIRATION FROM THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN

GRANT ME TO SOAR WITH YOUR EAGLES IN YOUR SKIES!

***Allow me to lean on Your chest with the Beloved St. John
And to accompany You up to the Cross
And to receive Your Mother from You as a Mother for me.
Yes, and grant me the wings of the Spirit so that I become an eagle, and join him
In flight in your heavens, and enjoy fellowship and glory with You.
I would live among Your angels
And get to know Your divine mysteries that provide heavenly food and satisfy
my innermost depths!**

*** Grant me to soar with my thoughts towards Eternity,
This that cannot be conceived by a heavenly or earthly being.
I stand and rejoice at Your birth before the beginning of time
Shine upon me O Word of God, with Your Father and Your Holy Spirit,
Then my soul will be filled with the brilliance of the Trinity.
Hence I will tread upon the darkness of the world
And soar in this amazing brilliance!**

***You became incarnate for my sake, O holy One who has granted me life,
You have enlightened me; hence I am no longer counted as one of this world.
Indeed, by Your grace, I enjoy divine adoption:
Having become a Son of God, the world cannot find room for it within me!**

***May Your Holy Spirit carry me to the mysteries within Your Book:
To see You- the King- hanging on the Cross!
I do not seek You to reign in the way the crowds sought to have You
But, rather, to establish Your throne in my depths that I may cherish Thee.
I will not take the road of philosophical arguments
For I recognize that You are the royal Messiah Who grants lordship.
I perceive You as the King of kings and the Giver of a Royal Life.**

***You are the Lamb of God Who carries the sins of the world!
You have been crucified and hence reconciled us with Your Father.
You have drawn us to You, and hence our sins have been replaced by Your
righteousness.**

**You have opened Your arms to embrace and enfold the Jews, Samaritans, and
Gentiles together.**

**By Your Cross You have poured love into us, O Lord of true love,
We have become an icon of You and will not become separated from Love,
neither will You leave us.**

**We have received fellowship with Your Nature, and love flows in our veins.
Neither hatred, nor contempt, nor wickedness can ever creep stealthily within us.**

*** Grant me, with the bride and bridegroom of Cana, to drink of the wine of
Your love.**

Grant me, with Nicodemus, to discover the mystery of the new birth.

**Grant me, with the Samaritan woman, to drink from the sources of Your Holy
Spirit.**

**Grant me, with the one born blind, perception that enables me to see You within
me.**

**Grant me, with the sick man of Bethesda, to be steadfast and rejoice,
Hence I would walk towards Your divine Embrace and reach my true home.**

*** Let me hear You as You reveal Yourself to me.
Your words 'I AM' have a special sweetness for You are Jehovah who lives within me!
According to Your promise, let me hear Your voice saying:
I am the heavenly Bread, he who eats Me will enjoy the eternal feast.
I am Life, without Me you would not exist.
I am the Light of the world, I shine on you hence you experience the eternal light.
I am the Truth, I bring you into the divine mysteries.
I am the Resurrection, death will never be able to bind you!
I am the Door, I lead you to come into My embrace.
I am the Good Shepherd, I carry you - with all your frailty - on My shoulders!
I am the true Vine, stay steadfast in Me and I will abide in you!
* Allow me to accompany You in the upper room, as well as to Gethsemane,
Let me go with You where You will be judged and crucified,
And to sit at Your tomb looking out for Your resurrection.
Reveal Yourself to me, and make Your resurrection shine within my depths!
Yes, throughout the days of my estrangement I will continue to meditate on every detail of Your amazing work:
These events will continue to be my reason for offering praise with all the heavenly ranks.
To You be the glory, O true Love and Truth: the One who grants love and freedom!**

AMEN

PART ONE: THE INCARNATE WORD CH 1

**PART TWO: THE MIRACLES AND ACTS OF THE LORD REVEAL HIS
DIVINITY CH 2- CH 12**

**PART THREE: HE MANIFESTS HIMSELF TO HIS FOLLOWERS CH 13 -
CH 17**

PART FOUR: THE SACRIFICED SON OF GOD CH 18-CH 19

PART FIVE: HIS RESURRECTION TESTIFIES TO HIS DIVINITY CH 20

PART SIX: CONCLUSION CH 21

PART ONE

THE INCARNATE WORD GRANTS GRACE

AND THE WITNESSES FOR HIM

CHAPTER ONE

- * **THE INCARNATE WORD WHO GRANTS GRACE V 1 - 18**
- * **WITNESSES FOR THE INCARNATED WORD V 19 -51**
- * **ADDENDUM TO CHAPTER ONE ON DIVINE GRACE**

CHAPTER 1

THE INCARNATED WORD

The soul watches in astonishment and deep awe as the Evangelist, St. John the Beloved, appears as an eagle in flight. He soars in the realm of divinity rather than in the tangible world. He invites us to cross over, and join him to go beyond time. He leads us to perceive the Word of God Who is never separated from the divine Mind. The Mind, too, is never separated from His Word: the only Son and consubstantial with His Father in one and the same essence. St. John invites us to perceive and acknowledge the Giver of life and the Source of light, the Creator of time and of every being in the heavens and on earth. Nothing preoccupies His Divinity other than His unique and beloved man!

Being inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Evangelist leads us to divine truths that affect our being and our future eternity and glory. Thus he does not present us with a mere literary form, but he invites us to partake of the depth of God's love and which cannot be fully explained in human words.

Witnessing to the Lord Jesus Christ

In this chapter, St. John speaks about the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ and presents his own testimony:

[1-5; 10-14; 16-18]. He also presents the testimony of St. John the Baptist: [6-9; 15; 19-37]. The Lord manifests Himself to Andrew [38-42], to Philip [43-51]. Their testimony is also indicated in these verses.

1- The Lord Jesus Christ is the everlasting Logos, one in essence with the Father [1-2]. He is the Donor of life and light, and through Him, we are granted the privilege of adoption to the Father [3-13].

2- St. John the Evangelist opens his Gospel by introducing the divine Word as the **Source of all divine blessings**, especially blessing the creation and our adoption to the Father, besides a wealth of other blessings **'grace for grace' [16-18]** that he elaborates in the next chapters.

3- **The official testimony of St. John the Baptist before Israel: 'priests and Levites'** came to ask him three questions. His answers are extremely concise. It is a testimony that represents a public confrontation between them. Briefly, his answer is that he has no name, for he is only **'the voice of one crying in the wilderness'** announcing the coming of the Lord, [19-28].

4- **The testimony of St. John the Baptist before his disciples [29-37]:** He initiates and elaborates about the Lord as he is speaking to the remnant about whom Isaiah prophesied: **"...the remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob to the Mighty God"** (Is 10:21). St. John the Baptist is speaking to the new Israel who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and Who will lead them into the New Testament. He affirms that the Messiah is coming, not in the person of a glorified king as the Jews thought, but as a suffering and rejected person: His glory is His love and His shouldering of the sins of the world [36].

5-The submission of St. John the Baptist's disciples to the Lord Jesus Christ: here a truly personal and sincere meeting occurs that leads to a full renewal of life, of name and of the whole existence. We watch the Lord Jesus Christ entering into the core of Simon's being and occupying his depths thereby transforming him into Peter

the apostle. Hence, his name, his mission, his life, and his whole existence are changed [42].

6- The invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the rest of His disciples in Galilee since the beginning. St. John announces the revelation of the eternal and hidden mystery as he affirms that man will see the heavens open and angels of God ascending and descending upon the person of Jesus Christ [50-51].

1- The Word of God 1-13

2- The Word became Flesh 14-18

3- The Testimony of John 19-34

4- The Testimony of the first disciples 35-53

1-THE WORD OF GOD

The Gospel of St. John begins with an introduction that is different than that of the other Synoptic Gospels. The introduction to the Gospel of St. Mark presents a description of St. John the Baptist and his work as an angel who prepares the way before the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One whom the prophets and fathers yearned for and they waited the day of His coming. The introduction to the Gospel of St. Matthew presents the lineage of the Lord beginning from Abraham. He then proceeds with the story of His birth, and indicates that He is the unique King who has come to restore the fallen kingdom of David, and to convert believers in Him into a royal nation. St. Luke begins his Gospel by writing a public and literary introduction (1:1-4), followed by the story of the birth of St. John the Baptist, then by that of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. He indicates how the Lord's sacrificial love and unique friendliness satisfies every soul, and fills every inner vacuum. In contrast, St. John begins by revealing the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ as the eternal Word long before He became incarnated. He does so to liberate us from the constraints of time and to soar into the embrace of the eternal Father. Consequently, we learn of God's plan concerning us and His will to lead us to redemption and eternal glory. He acquaints us with the One with Whom we will have fellowship in glory and eternal life. The introduction [1-18] thus underlines what is written in the Gospel as a whole: God proclaims Himself through His Word [1-13] as well as through His deeds [2-5] and ultimately through the divine incarnation for the glory the Father [14-18].

The introduction is mostly written in a distinctively poetic style and uses particular words that mark it from other Gospels. This has led scholars to question if that was a liturgical hymn that the apostle has borrowed? Or is it an addendum that he affixed after he had written the rest of the Gospel and could serve as a summary that reveals the aim of the Gospel and interprets it? Or is it an introduction written to announce the subject of his Gospel before beginning the task? The truth of the matter is that the object of the introduction is to introduce the reader to the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the subject of the Book, as the eternal Word. He is the One who works with the Father in the Creation. As He is the Father Himself, He proclaims the Father, and presents Him to us as though He is presenting Himself. He is the Wisdom of God speaking to us. He presents Himself, the Word of God, so that we might possess Him as a mystery granting us eternal life. He is the Life of every being, the Light of every person. He is the Eternal Who became incarnated and lived as a man. His own, the Jews rejected Him in spite of the testimony of St. John the Baptist for Him. However, a sincere remnant was found and they accepted Him and became children of God and members of the Divine Family.

We sing this introduction and the following verses each morning (Jn1:1-17) in order to comprehend that meeting the One Who alone can lift us up and carry us into His

Father's embrace is actually the reason for our daily renewal. This does not lead us to hold in contempt or belittle time but rather, it leads us to sanctify it as a means to go beyond it. In the morning prayers, we think of our Savior as the Alpha and Omega- the Beginning and the End- and so enjoy a holy beginning and a glorious ending.

St. Augustine⁶ tells us that his friend Simplicius informed him that a philosopher and follower of Plato commented on the sentences found at the beginning of the Gospel of St. John and said they deserve to be written in letters made of gold.

Matthew Henry reports that Francis Junius, who was totally immoral in his youth, got converted and became upright by the grace of God and after accidentally coming across this Gospel and reading it. His father had told him about it. He experienced the power and influence of St. John's Gospel over him, and it gripped his attention. For an entire day, he became oblivious of his surroundings and his movements, and physically shook with fear. This day marked the beginning of his spiritual life.

The verses (1-13) present eight great truths about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, these are:

A- He was and continues to be the Eternal One: **'In the beginning was the Word'** [1].

B- He was and still is the notable icon distinguished from the Father: **'...and the Word was with God'**, [1].

C- He was the Word while He was still God, [2].

D- He is the Partner with the Father in eternity, [2].

E- He is the Creator of the world, [3].

F- He is the Source of all life and light, [4, 5, 9].

G- He is God Who proclaims Himself to the fallen world, [10].

H- He came into man's world and His own rejected Him [11]; as for those who received Him, they attained a new birth [12-13].

The Logos

In the Chaldean manuscript, in an attempt to rewrite the Old Testament, the Messiah is called '**Memra**' meaning 'Jehovah's word.' It also says that many of the matters that are reported in the Old Testament and that were brought about by God were really done by the Word of God. Moreover, it teaches the Jews that 'the Word of God' was with God.

The word '**Logos**' is used to mean two things:

❖ **The Word that brings about creation or pregnancy or Logos endiathetas;** that means the thought by which the mind gets impregnated. This enables the achievement of all activity as it works in unison with the soul. Hence it is appropriate that the Second Icon be considered the Word of God; born of God, He is the principal and eternal Wisdom. **There is nothing more certain than the fact that we think, and there is nothing more mysterious than the discovery of our thought processes.**

❖ **The articulated word Logos prophorika,** that is speech itself, is the natural signal to what is in the mind. In the same way, Jesus is the Word used when the Father spoke 'in these last days' (Heb 1:2); and He guides us to listen to Him (Matt.17:5). He informs us about the thoughts of God as well as the thoughts of men. He is the Word speaking to us about things pertaining to the Father for He is the Truth

⁶ *De Civitate Dei, Lib 10, ch.29.*

and the Amen, as well as the true witness to the Divine Mind. In this aspect, He is different from St. John the Baptist who is 'a voice crying in the wilderness' and is not the divine Word.

St. Augustine makes a comparison between the bread that fills the stomach and the Word that satisfies the mind. When He provides food to the people, He cannot offer the same bread to all those present; whereas He offers the Word to everyone and all the people receive it fully in their minds. **Truly, the word of man is amazing as it is presented to all in its entirety: how much more efficient would the Word of God, the Creator, be?**

❖ If I wished to feed you, I could fill your stomach but not your minds. I would offer food to satisfy you, and do you not break it up to share together? Could my bread go to every single one of you? For if one of you gets it, then the rest would get nothing. However, note now that I am now speaking and you are all receiving my words. Not just that, but you all are receiving them in their entirety. **How amazing are my words! So how much more amazing is the Word of God?! Hear this also: I speak with utterances so that speech is delivered to you without getting separated from me. It reaches you while it does not depart from me. Before I spoke, I possessed the words while you did not have them. Now I have spoken the words and you have started to receive without my losing any of them. How amazing are my words! And how much more would the Word of God be?!¹**

St. Augustine

❖ O you foolish men, you speak as though you do not distinguish between the uttered word and the divine Word that exists before the beginning of time and is born of the Father! I say born and not just uttered. In Him there are no syllabic words but there is the fullness of the infinite Divinity and life without end (Col. 19,2:9, 3:4;Jn 1:4,5:26; 11:25, 14:6; Rev 1:18)².

St. Ambrose

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,'[1].

Written in the Hebrew language, this statement is composed of three stanzas that are musically balanced, with the term 'Word' and the verb 'was' repeated three times. The use of the verb in the past tense reflects that the 'Word' has been continuously present from the beginning and does not refer to time. Note these stanzas: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God: 'In the beginning':** The Book of Genesis starts with these words: **'In the beginning God created...'** The writer here is speaking about the beginning of Creation, or how time began with the Creation. As for the introduction of the Gospel of St. John, he starts with the state of things before the Creation and before time and history, when there was nothing but God Himself. He starts with the beginning of existence: **'In the beginning was the Word,'** and so indicates the eternal Word Who began that which had no beginning. The Apostle repeats this idea when the Lord tells the Jews: **"Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning,"**(Jn 8:25). In other words 'I am the Being who originally spoke or spoke since time infinite. In his First Epistle, St. John says: **' That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes...'** (1 Jn 1:1). The Lord tells the crowds: **" Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad...before Abraham**

¹ Sermon on N.T.Lessons, 70:3

² On the Christian Faith, Book, 4:9:102.

was, I AM” (8:56, 58).

Origen presents a number of interpretations for the word ‘the beginning.’ He also distinguishes between the relationship of the beginning with the Creator, as well as that of the beginning with the Creation. Ultimately, He is the beginning as He is the Wisdom and power of God (1Cor 1:24).

The Apostle confirms that the **Word** is ‘**in the beginning**’, and before all time and not just before the Lord’s incarnation. From the beginning, the world came into existence through His creation, **thus He was there from the beginning**- that is before time was. The Psalmist sings of the timeless of God Who is ‘**...Before the mountains were brought forth...**’ (Ps. 90:2; Prov. 8:23).

He is with God, and no one is to imagine that believing in the Word would draw him away from God: for the Word is with God and can never be separated. They are of one essence (Heb 1:3), and He is the object of the Father’s joy (Jn 17:5), and His beloved Son (Prov 8:30).

St. John Chrysostom³ wonders why the Evangelist does not begin by speaking about the Father and chooses to begin with the Son, who is one with Him in essence? Why did he begin by calling Him ‘the Word’ rather than the Son who is consubstantial with the Father? The Saint explains that the Evangelist begins by manifesting the person of the Lord Jesus Christ as being the incarnated ‘**Word**’ as this enables him to elaborate later on about His being the ‘Son of God.’ The title of ‘the **Word**’ confirms the oneness and the title of ‘**the Son, one in essence**’ confirms the distinction.

Consequently, the two titles are complimentary to each other. **St. John Chrysostom** justifies that by explaining that one often separates between the Father and the Son, and thus thinks that a change - which was not there before - has occurred in God due to the birth of the Son. This is the result of one’s concept of a tangible birth as it actually occurs in the creation, and that it did not occur long before time ever was. If the Evangelist had started by speaking about ‘the Son of God’, some could have suspected that these were two separate gods. In order to avoid this, St. John begins by the title ‘**the Word**’ that no one would ever imagine is separated from God.

Consequently He was the Father before which He was’nt such called

❖ The Evangelist calls Him ‘**the Word**’ as he intends to begin teaching that this Word is the Only Son of God and so that no one would doubt that His birth is a tangible one. Thus, by giving Him the title of ‘the Word’ he voids and prevents, in advance, any wicked intrigues or concepts, which might trouble anyone. He underlines that the Son proceeds from the Father, and that He was born without pain (change)¹.

❖ In order to prevent anyone from thinking that He was not a new born due to his use of the expression ‘**in the beginning**’, he immediately adds that He was ‘**with God**’ before proclaiming that He was God. He also wishes to prevent anyone from thinking that the Word is just a simple thing and a mere utterance or a thought so he adds a specific preposition...he does not say ‘He was in God’ but says ‘He was with God.’

❖ He does not call Him ‘Word’ but adds the defining article ‘the Word’ to distinguish Him from the rest of (men’s utterances)².

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The expression ‘**In the beginning**’ proclaims that there was nothing but the Everlasting Being, and that He is an absolute Being³.

❖ ‘**He was the Logos**’ since the term ‘being’ is used to refer to a person and when

³ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 2:7.*

³ *Comm. On John, hom. PG59: 13.*

referring to present time. However, to refer to God we need to indicate infinity. Hence, when we use the verb ‘was’ we use it to indicate past events related to our nature; whereas when we use it to refer to God we are proclaiming His eternity⁴.

❖ The Word is an actual divine essence standing out as an icon and apart from His Father but free of any conflicting split. In order to avoid thinking that the divinity of the Son is lesser than that of the Father, the Evangelist promptly presents the evidence of His divinity by saying: **‘And the Word was God’**⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Since He was a newborn, it is with good reason that St. John and others - be they an apostle or prophet- have not ascertained that He was a created being. While He is the One Who spoke of Himself humbly during His stay on earth, yet He did not wish to remain silent on this issue.... He uttered humble words (Jn 5:30; 12:49).... If He had been a created being, He would have said: “Do not think I am born of the Father, but rather that I am created and not born, and I am not one in essence.” However, in face of His reality, He spoke words that oblige human beings to accept involuntarily the alternative thought, such as His words:

“...I am in the Father and the Father in Me....” “ Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). **The Lord** also says: **“...that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father...”**(Jn 5:23); **“ For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will** (Jn 5:21). **“My Father has been working until now, and I have been working** (Jn5:17); **“As the Father knows Me even so I know the Father** (Jn10:15), **“I and My Father are one,”** (Jn 10:30)¹.

❖ **Isaiah the prophet** was astonished and said: **“And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living...”** (Is 53:8). Indeed, all traces of the birth of the Everlasting One have been eradicated from the earth for it is inconceivable to the human mind. And since it is beyond comprehension, then how can we say that He is created? We can clearly define the time creatures came into being and how they came about; but we are incompetent when it comes to defining the time when **the Beginning** came to be.

❖ Concerning **‘the Beginning Archi’** Who is above all and over all **‘He was the Word.’** He is not one of the natural creatures that are found under the feet of the Beginning, but He is above all creation for He is **‘in the beginning.’** In other words, He is of the same character and is constantly present with the Father, having the same nature as the One Who gave Him birth...from Him and with Him; He has lordship ‘archi’ over all.

St. Cyril, the Great

❖ By stating **‘He was in the beginning’** and not ‘after the beginning’ the implication is that there was no beginning without the Logos. In proclaiming that **‘the Logos was with God’** the Evangelist intends to indicate the absence of any fault in the relationship between the Son and the Father, since the Logos completely invades His

⁴ *Ibid*, hom. 3 PG 59:18,19.

⁵ Use has been made of some extracts written by St. John Chrysostom, and taken from the series of treasured manuscripts of El Baramos: *The Interpretation of the Gospel of St. John* by St. John Chrysostom, prepared by Fr Augustinus of El Baramos, 2001.

¹ Homily 3:3

thoughts while God is all pervading².

❖ Fearing the inadequacy of our minds, lack of training and inadequate hearing, St. John does not present the title of 'the Father' lest we imagine the physical picture and associate that with the presence of a mother as well. Neither does he mention '**the Son**' so that no one would conceive the Divine as some human being. That is why St. John names Him the '**Logos.**' Therefore, when you hear about '**the Word**' you will not imagine something that resulted as a whim: it is, rather, like the word that proceeds from your mind without any external interference³.

❖ Those who present to us good thoughts concerning such mysteries are actually unable to provide adequate expression concerning the nature of the Most Divine. They speak mostly about the brightness of God's glory and attempt to describe His essence (Heb1:3), the image of God, and that '**in the beginning was the Word and the Word was God**' (Jn 1:1). All these expressions appear to us like gold from a treasure trove, as we have not seen the Divine Person. But to those who are able to perceive the Truth, this is more like '**gold with studs of silver**' (Sg of Sol1:11), than mere brilliant gold. For, according to the Holy Bible, '**the tongue of the righteous is choice silver,**' (Prov.10:20).

Thus we realize that the nature of the Most Divine is beyond any expression we use to attempt to comprehend Him.

Our understanding is comparable to what we set as our goal; yet no one has seen or could see Him except it is through a mirror and in part (1Cor13:12).

This reflects our thoughts or the reflection of what lies in the spirit in a specific manner.

Every word representing these ideas seems to be like a point that needs to be extended since it falls short of adequately expressing what is in the mind....

Moreover, every word that is said in an attempt to explain God seems like a tiny drop that cannot be extended to measure up to its intended target; for it is directed to express the incomprehensible by using limited expressions. It is only through faith in these concepts that it can establish independently a nature that transcends all intelligence¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

❖ He is proclaimed as the Word, the Son, the Power of God, and His Wisdom: **The Word** since He is without blemish; **the Power** since He is perfect; **the Son** as he is begotten of and proceeds from the Father; and the **Wisdom** for He is one with the Father since time everlasting and one with Him in Divinity. This does not mean that the Person of the Father is one with the Son; for there is a clear distinction between the Father and the Son who comes as a result of birth. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ is true God from true God, everlasting from Everlasting, and perfect from perfect².

St. Ambrose

❖ There is One God Who has proclaimed Himself through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ: He is God's Word (the Logos). He is not a mere utterance but an essence: He is not a mere vocal means of expression but a Person born by Divine Power³.

² *On the Faith*

³ *Against Eunomius, book 4:1.*

¹ *The Song of Solomon, by St. Gregory of Nyssa: Transl. Into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 3.*

² *On the Christian Faith, Book 1:2:16*

³ *Ep.ad. Magn. 8:1*

St. Ignatius

The word ‘**Logos**’ was a familiar word to both Jews and Gentiles: Heraclitus recognized it, in about 500 A.D. to mean the all-inclusive mind that rules and controls the universe. This was a popular concept adopted and propagated by Stoics. In Hellenic Judaism, the ‘Logos’ stood for an independent Person and this idea developed so that it was linked to wisdom (Sophism) (Ws 9:1,2; 18:15). Hence **Philon of Alexandria** incorporated philosophical expressions and Biblical concepts and said that the Logos has come into the world as an example and as an image of Divinity.

❖ In the Greek language, ‘*logos*’ has numerous meanings: it means the word, the mind, esteem, and the reason of separate things that depend on all this to come to existence. By all this we proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ⁴.

St. Jerome

❖ We do know that the Lord Jesus Christ was not born in the same way that an uttered word is born; for He is the ultimate essence and living Word. He is not uttered by lips and spread to vanish, but He is eternally born of the Father and cannot be described in essence. Therefore, ‘**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God**’: Sitting at the right hand of God, the Word understands the Father’s will, is eternal, and everything exists by His command. The Word descended and ascended, whereas the word - which we pronounce - just descends and does not ascend.

He utters ‘the Word’ and says: “**I speak what I have seen with My Father...**” (Jn 8:38).

The Word possesses authority, have dominion over everything, for the Father has delivered all to the Son (Matt 11:27; Jn 5:22)¹.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ If there had been a time when the Son did not exist, the Father would have been a subdued Light; for if He has no brilliance, how can He be anything other than subdued Light? The Father is constantly present, and so is the Son...for the brilliance is born of the Light. Consequently, Brilliance is as everlasting as the Light from which it is born: Light is eternal and so is Brilliance. Light begets Brilliance, but has He ever existed without His Brilliance?... May you acknowledge that God gives birth to His everlasting Son².

St. Augustine

The use of ‘with’ here conveys the sense of ‘being with Him eternally’; that is the Word shares with the Father His eternal quality without any separation.

❖ ‘**The Word was with God**’ therefore He is as eternal as the Father Himself for there was no Father without the Word. Rather, God (the Word) was with God (the Father), Each having His own Person.

St. John Chrysostom

St. Ambrose underlines the equality of the Word with the Father. He bases his belief on the fact that the Evangelist mentions the Word before the Father. If the Father were

⁴ Letter 53 to Paulinus, 4.

¹ Essay 11:10.

² Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 68:1

greater with respect to the nature of Divinity, he would not have dared to do so. St. Paul the apostle also follows the pattern when he mentions the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ before the love of the Father (2 Cor 13:4). The order of the words (pertaining to the Trinity) is often the same, hence it is appropriate not to question the order or the degrees. In God there is the Father and the Son united in the Divinity and inseparable³.

St. John Chrysostom responded to the objection of the followers of Arius concerning the equality of the Word or the Son with the Father. They justified their claim by stating that the word ‘God’ is used here without a definite article: **‘And the Word was God.’** This is the same thought that the witnesses of Jehovah adopt currently. The Saint dismisses this claim as he clarifies that the Holy Bible sometimes speaks of the Father and the Holy Spirit without attaching to their names a defining article.

Moreover, there are instances when the Son and the Word are referred to as the God and here a definite article is prefixed. Speaking on the same subject, the Holy Bible assigns to the Word the same characteristics of God Who is the Everlasting, the Creator, and the Giver of life and light. For had He been lesser than God, the Bible would have revealed that clearly to avoid any confusion.

❖ The Evangelist has not used any expression to indicate limitations, for he does not say: ‘He has a beginning’ but rather **‘In the beginning.’** By using **‘was’** he leads us to the concept that the Son has no beginning. Someone may say: ‘Notice that a defining article precedes the Father (the God), whereas the Son has no article preceding it and therefore He is a god. How then can we explain the words of the apostle: **‘...our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,’** (Titus 2:13); and again: **‘...who is over all, the eternally blessed God,’** (Ro 9:5)?

It is true that here the Apostle refers to the Son without using the definite article, but he does the same thing with the Father, at least in the Letter to the Philippians (2:6), where he says: **‘...who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God’**; and again in the Letter to the Romans: **‘Grace to you and peace from God (with no article) our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,’** (Ro 1:7).... And again when he speaks about the Father, he says: **‘God is a Spirit’** (John 4:24). Indeed, not having an article preceding the word ‘Spirit’ does not negate the spiritual nature of God. Similarly, in the instance where no article precedes the Son, the Son does not become lesser than God¹.

St. John Chrysostom

‘He was in the beginning with God’ [2]

❖ By stating that **‘He was in the beginning with God’**, St. John reveals to us that the Lord Jesus Christ shares with His Father the feature of eternity. Hence, upon hearing that the Only Begotten **‘was in the beginning’**, you need to understand that He was before all reasoning creatures or before all ages.

❖ The Father has never been without the Word. Indeed, God has always been with the Word, but Each in His appropriate Person².

St. John Chrysostom

❖ **‘And the Word was with God’**: The Father and the Son are not one in Person, for Each is a Person that can be perceived in the other due to their unity in essence: He is God from God, the Son from the Father.

❖ **‘He was in the beginning with God’**, that is the Son, Who is with the Father, and

³ *On the Christian Faith, Book 5:9:117*

² *Homily 4:1*

born from His essence, is the only begotten Son who is referred to by the word ‘He.’

St. Cyril the Great

❖ The Logos can also be ‘the Son of God’ since He is trusted with the mysteries of His Father, Who is ‘the Mind.’ In contrast, the analogous Son is called ‘the Word.’ Just as the word exists within us and is the messenger to what the mind comprehends, so is the Word of God. For He knows the Father and proclaims that Whom He knows. No creature can enter into a relationship with Him unless He leads him. No one knows the Father except the Son and to whomsoever the Son reveals the Father (Matt. 11:27). As He is the Word, He is the great Counselor on Whose shoulders dominion rests (Is 9:6 LXX). He became King as He suffered and carried the Cross. The Book of the Revelation speaks of the Word, the Faithful and the True riding a white horse (Rev 19:11): I believe that He is coming to abide in us in order to clarify the Voice of Truth that He carries (mounts)³.

Origen

Origen, reports that the prophets of the Old Testament enjoyed the Word of God that was revealed to them (Ho.1:1; Is.2:1; Jr 14:1). Hence, it is reported: ‘**The word of the Lord that came to Hosea the son of Beer...**’ (Ho 1:1). The word Hosea means ‘the Savior’, and Beeri means the ‘wells’; hence everyone who has enjoyed redemption is a child of the wells that flow out of the depths of the wisdom of God. He is Wisdom’s child, and according to the Holy Bible: “**...wisdom is justified by all her children,**” (Lk.7:35; Matt.11:19). Concerning the Father, the Bible says: ‘**And the Word was with God**’: it does not say ‘The Word came to God’ for the Word is eternal with the Father⁴.

❖ Nevertheless, the Word came to mankind who could not have previously accepted the journey of the Son of God, and Who is the Word. On the other hand, the Word did not come in order to be with God and as though it had not previously been with Him; for He has been always with the Father. In that context, the Bible says: ‘**The Word was with God**’ (Jn.1:1), since He did not come to be with God⁵.

❖ The same verb ‘**was**’ refers to the Word when He was in the beginning and when He was with God. He was never separate from the beginning and never departed from the Father. To reiterate, He did not come to be in the beginning as someone who was not there in the beginning. Moreover, He has not changed from being non-existent with God to being existent with Him: He has been there, since time everlasting and before all ages: ‘**In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God**’¹.

❖ Additionally, by His coming to the prophets, He shone upon them with the light of Knowledge and granted them to perceive, as though with their own eyes, matters they could not comprehend before His coming. As for His being with God, the Word is God for He is with Him².

Origen

‘**All things were made through Him**

⁴ *Commentary on John, Book 2:4 -8.*

⁵ *Commentary on John, Book 2:8*

¹ *Commentary on John, Book 2:9.*

² *Commentary on John, Book 2:10.*

And without Him nothing was made that was made' [3].

The Evangelist presents the Word as the 'Creator' for by Him all was made, and without Him there was nothing that was made. St. John speaks about this only after clarifying the eternal relationship between the Father and the Word. Hence, the Father and the Son (the Word) and the Holy Spirit are intrinsically united: the absolute love and life. This Divine Nature that overflows with love does not need a heavenly or earthly creation to achieve love in a practical way. Love operates among the Divine Persons since eternity: the Creation is the result of overflowing divine love. It did not occur as a necessary instrument to achieve God's love but, rather, it is the fruit of that love. What we say about the Creation is also true of Redemption since it is the New Creation.

The eternal Word is the Creator and the Redeemer: He achieves the will of God that is at one with the will of the Son.

In saying '**All things were made through Him**', He is distinctly set apart from all heavenly, human, and material creations: He is the Creator of everyone and everything wherever it may be.

'...**through Him**...' underlines that through Him all came into being, or he Created all. The verb '**was**' here, as used in the Greek text, has a different meaning from its use in the context of '**the Word.**' Here it indicates creation while it refers to the Almighty Presence when used in conjunction with 'the Word.'

The preposition '**through**' is used to convey that He was the means, the path, and the sustainer. Indeed, He has created and continues to plan for His creation as He cares for it and guards it. This is how St. Paul the apostle expresses this thought: '**For by Him all things were created... through Him and for Him...and in Him all things exist,**' (Col.1:16, 17; '**...upholding all things by the word of His power,**' (Heb. 1:3); '**...for in Him we live and move and have our being,**' (Acts 17:28).

St. John Chrysostom finds that the Evangelist focuses on the unified work of the Word and the Father in the course of the Creation. He explains that St. John intends to reveal the divinity of the Word and His equality with the Father. Hence he says: '**...and without Him nothing was made that was made,**' in order to affirm that the role of the Word in the Creation is fundamental. Without Him, it would have been impossible to achieve the Creation or sustain its continuity.

When Moses the prophet speaks about the Creation, he says: '**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,**' he was worried that someone would think the earth is eternal and so he ascertained it had a beginning and it is the masterful work of the Creator. If the Word had been a creature, the Evangelist would have affirmed his being created rather than speaking about Him as the Creator of all.

❖ Who could commit such a mistake and proclaim that the One who creates and makes all things is at the same time a creature? I wonder: Has God created Himself? ...who could think in this way? God in His wisdom has created all things (Ps104:24). If that is so, how can we assume that wisdom is created of itself? ¹

St. Ambrose

❖ If you assume that the expression '*through Him*' indicates that He is lesser since it makes of the Lord Jesus Christ an instrument used for creation, then hear what (David) says: '**Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands,**' (Ps 101(102):25). What he says about the Father as a creator also applies to the Son: he would not have said this if he had not believed Him to be the Creator and not just another's helper. Hence the expression '**through Him**'

is used for the sole reason that the Psalmist has: no doubt that the Son was not born. Concerning His title of Creator, this underlines that He is no lesser than the Father in any way. Listen to how He speaks about Himself: **‘For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will,’** (Jn.5:21)².

❖ Do you not agree that by adding: **‘...and without Him nothing was made that was made’**, St. John has ended all the difficult issues? The statement: **‘...and without Him nothing was made that was made’**, is complemented by: **‘All things were made through Him...’** Hence, he embraces all things the mind can comprehend (things that exist in the intangible world) yet do not include the (the Holy) Spirit...

Lest someone says: “If everything was made through Him, then the Spirit was born as well”; I answer: “I am convinced that what was born was born through Him: whether it is tangible or intangible or in the heavens. That is why he did not use an absolute expression such as ‘All things’, but he said **‘All things..., made,’** referring to creatures. As for the Spirit, he is not a creature...do you not see the accuracy of his teachings... he has excluded the Holy Spirit from all other creation.

As St. Paul had received the same grace, he writes in the same Spirit and says: **‘For by Him all things were created...’** (Col.1: 16). Notice here the same accuracy for the same Spirit (the Holy) has stirred this soul as well. None of the creatures are excepted from being the work of God... **‘whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.’** The expression ‘whether’ is all-inclusive and underlines that there is nothing else to be understood other than this: **‘All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made’**³.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Could the Word be made by God? No, Because He too was with God since the beginning. Are the things that God has created different from the things that the Word has created? No, because all things were made through Him. By what means were they created by Him? Because in Him was life and before creating them life existed. What has been created was not done by life but by the Wisdom of God, and before creating them, life existed. That which is created moves on and transpires, whereas that which is found in Wisdom can never transpire⁴.

❖ If you say: **‘All things’** then you will not be lying since this Word is called the Wisdom of God; and as it is written: **‘In wisdom You have made them all’** (Ps.104:24)⁵.

St. Augustine

❖ The bride regards attentively the hand of the bridegroom as it represents his power to work, saying, **“My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door...”** (Song of Sol 5:4). Yet it is impossible for human nature to embrace the infinity of divine nature, and the bride says: **“And my heart yearned for him,”** (Song of Sol 5:4)...every soul is astounded at her capacity to comprehend the dazzling works made by God for they transcend human capacity. This is due to the inexplicable and incomprehensible Divine Nature that makes these wonders. Every living creature is the product of this Hand that appeared by the latch. That explains why St. John cries

² Hom 5.PG 59:37

³ Homilies on St. John, Hom. 5:2.

⁴ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 3:4

⁵ Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67:3.

out in his Gospel saying: ‘**All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that were made,**’ (Jn. 1 :). Isaiah the prophet expresses the same thought and calls the hand the power of God to work: “**For all those things my hand has made, and all those things exist,**” says the Lord (Is.66: 2). The mind is unable to comprehend such achievement: the beauty of the heavens with the stars and the sun, and the rest of the wonders of nature. However, the human heart fears the power of God. If man is unable to understand all the works of God, then how can he comprehend God Who is above all that is in the creation?¹

❖ Let us go back to these verses and benefit from the above so that they echo the words of the friends of the bride: “**What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved that you so charge us?**”

Let us listen attentively as our veils have been lifted up: let us turn towards the Truth with our inner eyes.

How does the bride describe to her bridesmaids the One she is seeking?

How does she describe in words the stature of the One for whom she is yearning?

How does she prepare the virgins for the One they do not know? On the one hand, Christ has not been created yet there is an aspect of Him as a creature: we know that the One not created is eternal and found before the world was established, and that He is the Creator of all. On the other hand, there is an aspect that is created as He was formed according to our lowly flesh (Phil 3:21). We might understand these words better by examining them in the light of the Holy Bible: We know that **in the beginning was the Word, that He had always been with God, that the Word was not created, and that without Him nothing was made that was made**’ (Jn 1:1-3). The Word was with God and the Word was God, and through Him all things were made. We also know that Jesus Christ was born, that is, He became flesh and dwelt among us. His incarnation clearly revealed his greatness: He is God, the only begotten Son of God who abides in the Father’s embrace. He appeared in the flesh, and according to St. John: ‘**...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth,**’ (Jn.1: 14)².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

❖ **All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made**’: since we believe that everything was created through the Son, therefore we cannot consider Him to be one of the whole (of the creation). Indeed, He is totally different for He does share the nature of the created beings. We do confess that He alone is by nature the true God.

❖ He did not receive power from someone else to create, but He is the power of God the Father. The only Son Who does everything with the Father and the Holy Spirit. For everything proceeds from the Father by the Son. If the Son were created separately from the Father, the Son would not have been able to say: “**I am in the Father and the Father in Me,**” (Jn 14:10).

St. Cyril, the Great

St. Augustine says that some - such as the followers of Manni - believe that Satan has created certain creatures, such as flies for example. He answers such believers, as the followers of Manni, that God is the sole Creator of all things. He has created

¹ *Song of Songs by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 11.*

² *Song of Songs by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 13.*

eventhese creatures that appear to be insignificant or harmful, for the well being of men and to dismantle him of pride. [You need to know, my brethren, that these creatures have been created to restrain our pride by presenting hardships for us. Thus God diminished the pride of the people under Pharaoh by sending flies, and frogs; rather than tanks or lions: He humbled them as they submitted to the most insignificant of creatures¹.]

St. Augustine

‘In Him was life, and the life was the light of men’ [4].

The Evangelist draws a distinction between **‘life’ as a creative element** and **‘life’** that is created and temporal. He speaks of the Word not just as a living Person but as **‘life’** as well. This is what the Lord Jesus indicated when He spoke of Himself as being born before all time: **‘... to have life in Himself,’** (Jn 5:26). For He is the essence of the incomprehensible life. Hence the Evangelist says: **‘...the life was manifested’** (1Jn 1:2), and this is through incarnation.

Creative life grants life to others, **“ For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will,”** (Jn5: 21). It is not that there is life in Him, but He is life itself. Hence **‘All things were made through Him.’** The Bible says: **‘...that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life...’** (Deut 30:20). The Psalmist also sings: **“For with You is the fountain of life; in your light we see the light,”** (Ps 36: 9).

‘...and the life was the light of men,’ [4]. When we receive Him as our life, we become enlightened. Moreover, we realize that our temporal life on earth is a divine gift that motivates us to be attracted to ‘eternal life’ where the brightness of eternal glory shines. In heaven, we will be with the Lord Jesus Christ and know Him fully. We will enjoy seeing Him, become united to Him, and rest steadfastly in Him, and ultimately, we will have attained eternal life: **‘And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent,’**(Jn 17:3). Just as the Word is the creative Life and Giver of created life, He is also the essential Light inherent in the divine nature and the One that cannot be approached. He shines upon us with His grace so we consequently become a light that reflects the radiance of His light wherever we go. When the Lord declared Himself to Saul of Tarsus, Saul said: **“...a great light from heaven shone around me, and I fell to the ground...”** (Acts 22:7).

❖ The Evangelist calls Him both **‘the Light’** and the **‘Life’**; for he freely grants us light. It is light that proceeds from knowledge and the life that arises from it. The use of one name, or two, or three, or more is insufficient to teach us about God. We need to be ready to comprehend His mysterious features through numerous means².

St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom believes that since the Lord Jesus Christ is Life or the source of life, He can only be eternal. Otherwise, who could have granted life if He Himself did not exist at some point in time?

❖ He is life...that has no beginning and no end; and therefore is truly Life as should be. For if there had been a time when there was no Life, then how can other life be formed if Life itself did not exist?!³

¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 1:15*

³ *Homily 4:3*

❖ St. John says about the Lord Jesus Christ: **‘In Him was life....’** so that just as the Father possessed life within Himself, He gave His Son the same innate possession of life.

St. John did not say: ‘And the life was the light of the Jews’, but he put it in an all-inclusive way, thus: **‘...and the life was the light of men.’** For the light was not for the Jews alone, but it was offered to all in general. They came to this same knowledge, as this light was set to shine on all.

You may wonder: what is the reason that led him to omit the addition of ‘angels’ to men and rather chose to say **‘...and the life was the light of men’?** We say: Because what he said at the present time is offered to all mankind: He came to them to carry the glad news of good gifts¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Nothing that has been created has been made without Him; for He is the life that made the creation possible².

St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitier

❖ **‘In Him was life...’:** He grants the creation the blessing of existence, and He also grants the blessing of continuity. Out of His goodness, He grants eternity to creatures who do not possess it innately. Hence He becomes the life to everything that came into being so that it continues to exist within the limits of its nature.

❖ If the Son were not of the essence of the Father but rather from an external origin, then He would have been subordinate to the Father just like other creatures. **But how then could He give life to all, while He is among all that has been created? ...**

How can we interpret these words of the apostle, St. Paul, concerning the nature of God: **“...who gives life to all things...”** (1 Tim 6:13). How can the Son be a creature and at the same time be able to give life to all...then the creation would be able to give life to itself and would not need God at all. Moreover, there would be nothing to differentiate between the divine nature and other creatures. Indeed, the creation would be like God and have power to do the same work as God.

❖ If the Son is not of the essence of God the Father...then how could the Psalmist conceive the amazing wonder of Him who is by nature God: **“In Your light we see light,”** (Ps.36: 9). **If the Son, as a creature, shines on all things created, then the creation would be shining on itself and would not need the light of God, her Creator.**

St. Cyril, the Great

❖ If anyone wishes to possess the Word, and if anyone wishes to have the Word, he does not need to search outside himself for something to offer: he needs to offer himself. By doing so, he does not lose himself in the same way that someone would lose the price of something he has bought³.

❖ He who possesses the Word, let him offer himself: that is the price of the Word. It is said that he who gives does not lose himself, but, rather, possesses the Word and is devoted to Him. Indeed, he wins his own soul too as he comes to the Word who is his own Creator⁴.

❖ The Bible speaks about Wisdom and says: **“She is the radiance of the everlasting light....”** And in another passage: **“She is a reflection of eternal light, a perfect**

¹ Homily 5:3

² On the Trinity 2 (20)

³ Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67:1.

mirror of God's activity and goodness," (Ws 7:26)...let us draw a parallel from this to find a common factor between two elements as this will enable us to comprehend the fellowship found in the Eternal. Light proceeds from fire, and light produces fire. Hence we may wonder which is the result of the other? Every time and as we light a candle, we will have to remember that there is something intangible and indescribable: we know that a candle needs to be lit in the darkness of this world...**present to me a fire without radiance and I will believe that the Father existed been without the Son**⁷.

St. Augustine

❖ **Origen** believes that the Messiah first came spiritually and then came physically. He came in the Old Testament to those who were perfect, and who had become mature and were no longer children. They were not in the custody of teachers and educators: they had matured in the fullness of their spiritual time (Gal.4: 4). Such is the case of the patriarch fathers and the prophets who contemplated the glory of the Messiah. Just as the Lord visited the perfect ones before the tangible journey He made in the flesh, He likewise does not visit those who remain children after He has come, and who do not wish to become mature².

❖ If we understand that **'In Him was life'**, the One who said: **"I am...the life,"** (Jn 11: 25), then we will say that no one who lacks faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is alive. Moreover all those who do not live for Him are dead. Their lives are spent in sin rather than for the Mind (Logos): in other words, it is a life of death³.

❖ Let us study the expression: **"He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living..."** (Mk 12:27). This is equivalent to the statement: 'He is not a God of sinners, but a God of saints'.... He is the God of the fathers and of all the saints. No one can find a record anywhere that mentions that He is a God of any wicked man. Therefore, and since He is the God of saints, and that He has been described as the God of the living, we may state that the saints are alive, and that those alive are saints. **Indeed, no one can be considered alive unless he truly exists as a saint**⁴.

❖ If the life is equivalent to **'the light of men'**, then no one existing in darkness is alive; and no one alive exists in darkness. Indeed, everyone who is alive is also in the light and everyone in the light is alive. Consequently, only the one who is alive is the son of the light, and the son of the light is the one whose deeds shine before men (Matt 5:16).⁵

❖ St. Paul says that there was 'darkness and now there is the light of God,' (1Cor 2:14-15). Hence, **it is possible for darkness to be transformed into light.** This is not hard for someone who believes in the potential of man to change, and to become better. ...Or get worse⁶.

❖ It is possible for the One who possesses the light of men, and who gives its rays to fulfil works of light and is the the light of knowledge (Ho.10: 12 LXX). We also need to consider the opposite aspect, which suggests that, every wicked act, but still called knowledge, does not proceed according to the truth, and as such has darkness as its basis⁷.

Origen

⁷ Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67:11.

² Commentary on John, Book 1:37-38.

³ Commentary on John, Book 2.115

⁵ Commentary on John, Book 2: 132.

⁶ Commentary on John, Book 2; 136

⁷ Commentary on John, Book 2:158

❖ This kind of light affects the mind but not the senses: it enlightens the soul itself. The Lord Jesus Christ explains this: **“No one can come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him,”** (Jn 6:44). On this theme, the Lord proclaims that He (the Son) is the One who gives ‘light’ [9] and therefore, if we hear such a saying about the Father, we should not think it speaks of the Father alone for it applies to the Son as well. The Lord also says: **“All things that the Father has are Mine,”** (Jn 16:15)¹.

❖ **‘And the light shines in the darkness,’ [5].** He designates death and sin as darkness since the light of the senses does not shine within the darkness but rather shines on the outside of it. As for the preaching of the Lord, it shines in the midst of oppressing sin and dispels it. By undergoing death, He conquered death, and healed those who really believed in Him. That is how neither death nor sin can conquer the Word. It is radiant everywhere and shines with the power due to Him².

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The Light of the mind is more sublime than the mind and surpasses all minds. This is the Life through Whom everything was made³.

❖ Do not be in darkness, O mankind, and do not be unbelieving. Do not exist in darkness, in wickedness, in covetousness, in greed and lusting for the world: this is darkness. **The Light is not absent, it is you who are absent from the light⁴.**

St. Augustine

‘And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it,’ [5].

The work of the ‘Sun of Righteousness’ is to shine with His light upon the world, yet He does not oblige those sitting in darkness to receive His light. A man who rejects the light, and holds on to darkness, becomes a darkness that cannot comprehend or tolerate the light. Whereas a man who accepts the light becomes a light to the world and cannot tolerate darkness.

Since the Word incarnate is ‘the true light’; then Satan who has forsaken the source of light has become ‘darkness.’ He exerts himself to attract all mankind to his kingdom and consequently have dominion over them. That explains why the Lord called him ‘the power of darkness,’ (Lk.22: 53).

The kingdom of darkness is established in the absence of the true light. That is when mankind is separated from the divine Word and therefore have no “life’, no ‘light’, no ‘truth’, and no ‘peace.’ This is where deeds of darkness occur, such as spiritual death, denial, lies, hatred, dissensions, corruption, etc...

Darkness can neither comprehend the light nor tolerate it. Hence it takes a hostile stand as an attempt to prevent the light from touching it. The darkness imagined it could eradicate the ‘Sun of Righteousness’ by crucifying Him. It did not realize that through the Cross it has destroyed itself, and that consequently the ‘Sun of Righteousness’ shone on those who sat in the darkness: **‘The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined,’ (Is 9:2).**

❖ **‘Darkness’** is the nature that needs to be enlightened- that is the created

¹ Homilies on St. John, Hom. 5:3.

² Homily 5:3

³ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 3:5

⁴ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate3: 5.

nature...he considers that the reasoning creation lacking the divine nature is darkness. Hence it is incapable to produce anything independently and with its own potentials.

- ❖ The Word shines over all things that are able to receive His rays and His light.
- ❖ The Word, that is the Son is unknown to darkness. This is because the reasoning creature living on earth, that is man, has worshipped the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). He did not comprehend the light for he did not know the Creator.

St. Cyril the Great

- ❖ Light shines in the darkness, and in this life, and in the body. At the same time, darkness pursues it, yet it will not defeat it. I mean that the opposing power continues its shameful attack against the actual Adam but it collides with God and gets defeated. Hence by tearing darkness away, we get close to the light, and consequently become fully light and the children of the perfect Light ¹.

St. Gregory, the Theologian

- ❖ St. John says: “...**the darkness did not comprehend it**’: for it is impossible to have a defeated Messiah. Moreover, He cannot live in souls that do not want the light. However, do not be disturbed if the light does not embrace all, for He does not abide forcefully or by intimidation. Indeed, as a result of a person’s will and acceptance, God brings His light to him. Do not close your doors in the face of that Light for you will enjoy great happiness. However, this Light descends due to faith, and when it comes it richly enlightens the one receiving Him. Moreover, if you lead a pure life that is worthy of the Light, He will continue to dwell within you. The Lord promises that: **“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make Our home wit him,”** (Jn 14:23).

A man who closes his eyes cannot enjoy the sun’s light. Similarly, no one can share and enjoy the Eternal Light unless he opens up his soul’s inner perception and strives to keep his focus steadfast in every possible manner.

How can this be achieved? When the soul is cleaned from all desires: for all sin is darkness- a deep darkness. This is clear in the way people unconsciously and secretly commit sin: **“For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed,”** (Jn 3:20). **“For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret,”** (Eph 5:12). Moreover, a man living in darkness knows neither friends nor foes: he is unable to make a distinction among the nature of things. That is typical of a man living in sin. Thus a the one who seeks to make huge profits does not distinguish between friend and foe; a covetous man carries hatred even to those closest to him; and a plotter is in constant conflict with everyone in common...

Briefly, a sinner is no better than a drunkard or a madman. Just as wood, lead, silver, gold, and precious stones appear to be similar at night due to the absence of light and thus hindering the perception of any distinctions among them, so is the one who leads a corrupt life: he is unable to make a distinction and comprehend the grandness of self control or the beauty of philosophy (wisdom) ².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ He who strays away from the true Light, that is moving away from God, becomes blind immediately. Yet, he does not realize the result and his judgment even though it

¹ Oration 39, on the Holy Lights (Epiphany), 2.

has actually been delivered already¹.

St. Augustine

❖ The Psalmist expresses our yearning: **‘Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar! My soul has dwelt too long...’** (Ps 120:5; Vulgate 6). ‘Kedar’ means ‘darkness’, and darkness represents the actual world, for we are told: **‘And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it² [5].’**

St. Jerome

‘There was a man sent by God, whose name was John’ [6].

The verb ‘was’ in Greek means ‘became’ as opposed to ‘was’ that occurs in verse 1: ‘the Word was...’ where it conveys ‘being’ in the sense that He was and is timeless. The Holy Bible does not say: ‘God sent John the Baptist’ for the focus is on the mission itself: **‘...a man sent by God...’** The aim of that mission was to bear witness to the divine Word who is the Light shining upon those sitting in the darkness.

❖ Since you are told that John has been sent by God, then do not think that he speaks of his own words. Rather, he speaks with the words of Him who has sent him; and therefore he is called an angel: **“Behold, I send My messenger...”** (Malachi 3:1). Note that the virtue of the angel is that he does not speak of his own words³.

St. John Chrysostom

‘This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe,’ [7].

St. John the Evangelist is preoccupied by the proclamation of the person of the Messiah: that we may believe in Him, and consequently enjoy the everlasting Life as our Light in this world and glory in the life to come. For this purpose, he presents numerous witnesses and we note the repetition of the verb ‘to witness’: it occurs 33 times throughout this Gospel as well as the noun ‘a witness’ that is repeated 14 times. Concerning ‘the witness’ the reference is to: the witness of the Father for Him (5:31); the witness of the Lord Jesus for Himself (8:14); the witness of the Holy Spirit (15:26); the witness of the Lord’s deeds (5:36); the witness of the fathers and the prophets (5:39); the witness of John the Baptist (1:7); the witness of the disciples (15:27); as well as the witness of the Samaritan woman and the Samaritans to Him (Ch 4); that of the blind man whose sight was restored (Ch 9); and after His resurrection, the testimony of Thomas.

Origen says that the ‘voice in the wilderness’ witnessed for the Word. He presents six testimonies:

1- He witnessed to His greatness as He comes after Him even though He is the Eternal Who preceded Him. He is the Giver of all gifts and the Informant about the Father (Jn 1:15-18). All these expressions include in the testimony of St. John the Baptist who came before the Messiah, not, as some believe that part of it is the testimony of St. John the Evangelist.

2- His witness before the messengers sent by the priests and the Levites coming from Jerusalem (Jn 19:1-27).

3- For a third time, he testifies to the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ and indicates that he is unworthy to loosen the straps of his shoes (Jn1: 26-27), while He is there

¹ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67:5*

² *Letter 39:3*

³ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 6:1*

among them and they did not know Him.

4- On the next day, St. John the Baptist testifies that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29).

5-His witness after he saw the Holy Spirit descending and resting upon Him (Jn 1:33-34).

6- For the sixth time, he witnesses before two of the disciples that He is the Lamb of God (Jn 1:35-36)¹.

❖ Someone might ask: What does all this mean? Is the testimony of a slave to his master valid?... I answer by telling the words that the Lord Jesus Christ gave to the Jews: **“Yet I do not receive testimony from man...”** (Jn 5:34). If you would ask: If Christ did not need this testimony, then why did God send John the Baptist?! I say response is: He did not send John because He needed His testimony for this is a serious blasphemy. Then why? The Evangelist tells us himself: **‘...that all through Him might believe...’** Do not think that John the Baptist bore witness in order to add some credibility or trust in the Lord. No, he did so in order to make those of his own nature (human beings) to believe².

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The Evangelist did not assume the role of being the sole witness to the Lord Jesus Christ; for although it is a true testimony yet he did not want to disobey the Law (that requires two or three witnesses)...this is particularly important as he is proclaiming matters that are above the grasp of the human mind. For that reason, he brings in St. John the Baptist to join him and bear witness.

❖ A veiled opinion spread among some people, that St. John the Baptist was not a real man, but one of the heavenly angels, vested by flesh, and sent by God to preach to people. This is a myth that resulted from misinterpreting the words of God, saying: **“behold, I send My messenger, and He will prepare the way before Me,”** (Mal 3:1);). Because these people had abandoned the truth, they had misunderstood the meaning of the word ‘angel.’ It means a servant or a messenger while it does not specify the real essence of that servant.

St. Cyril the Great

“He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness to that Light,” [8].

❖ The Baptist chose to live in the wilderness and away from the pleasures of the city. He proclaimed his steadfast adherence to a life of virtue. Hence he progressed to the pinnacle of righteousness to which no man could attain. This led people to be amazed at his style of living and some even imagined him to be the Messiah...Some imagined him to be the Light Himself.

❖ These words are reported about St. John the Baptist: **“He was the burning and shining lamp...”** (Jn 5:35). Although saints are said to be lights...yet we do not deny the gift that they have received from ‘the Light.’ Note that the light is in the lantern and does not come from it. Similarly, the light of the saints does not emanate from them: it is the result of the Truth that hence they **‘shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life (Phil 2:15, 16).**

St. Cyril the Great

❖ St. John the Evangelist does not say these words for no reason otherwise his words would be of no value. He does so to dismiss any doubt as commonly thought that the

¹ *Commentary on John, Book 2:212-218.*

² *Homilies on St. John, Hom.6: 1.*

witness is greater than the One for whom he testifies. Therefore the Evangelist immediately, and from the beginning, dismisses these assumptions and unearths them. He reveals the identity of that witness, the identity of Him for whom he witnessed, and the distinction between the two¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ John was a light, yet he was not the true Light. If he had not been enlightened, he would have suffered from the darkness. However, he became a light by his being enlightened².

St. Augustine

“That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world,” [9].

This was a popular expression used among the Jewish teaches, every newborn child sees the light of which he was deprived while he was in his mother’s womb. Here the light means the new life since the newborn is blind and at his birth he sees the light. In other words, at his birth he is introduced to a new life that is different from the prenatal condition. Similarly, the Lord Jesus Christ shines with the light of His presence upon a new world that everyone, who is born spiritually, enjoys.

St. Cyril the Great considers that faith is the lamp, and the incarnate Word of God is the light. He says: [God’s Word is the subject of our belief: He is the Light. The lamp is faith, while He is the true light that shines to every man who comes into the world (Jn 1:9)³.

The word **‘true’** implies the sole Light that has the power to reveal the One Who is wholly Truth, and informs us of the divine mysteries. Indeed, He is a perfect and constant Light, that is never interrupted. This true Light is the sole One who can enter into the knowledge of the Father, the true God (Jn 3:17). He offers Himself to us **the true and perfect divine Truth, the true Bread** descending from heaven, **the true Vine** with Whom we can enjoy unity as branches of Him, who is the Vine. Through Him we can become true **worshippers**: worshipping Him in spirit and in truth.

He is the Light **‘...which gives light to every man who comes into the world...’ [9]**. He wishes to save everyone and to attract him or her to the Truth. He does not wish to conceal Himself from anyone, yet He does not obligate any to accept Him.

St. John does not say ‘He gave light’ but, rather, that He **‘gives light’** as this is a constant situation: the door of His love is constantly open. Indeed, He descends to everyone to invite him to enjoy His light. Hence everyone is entitled to receive and enjoy Him.

He is the Light that enriches everyone receiving Him by granting him divine enlightenment that surpasses the mind. As for those who reject Him, they are like those whom the sun has hit in their weak eyes and blinded **“He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts”** (Jn 12:40) And as the Lord said: **“For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind,”**(Jn 9:39).

‘...who comes into the world...’ does not refer to ‘every man’ but to ‘the true Light’, for the Word, the true Light, came to the world in the flesh. Human discernment didn’t occur, but in the same way as the sun shines on our earth from afar. This happened by His coming to our world and appearing among us.

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 6:1.*

² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 2:6.*

³ *In Ius. 11:33-36.*

❖ Where are they who claim that the Lord Jesus Christ is not a true God? He is called here **‘the true Light’**, the Truth itself, and Life itself.

❖ If He gives light to every man who comes into the world, then how do we still find large numbers who are not enlightened yet? Because not all have become acquainted with the dominion of the Lord. Then how does He give light to every man? He gives light to all and according to the person’s capacity to receive light within himself. As for those who reject or who shut off the eyes of their minds and refuse the rays of that Light, then their darkness is not due to the nature of the Light. It is due to their wickedness, which has turned them away from the Light¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ We will become like the Light as we come close to the light of the true Christ. According to the Lord’s words, if we leave the dark atmosphere of the world and live in the heights, we become lights (Jn 9: 5; 1:9). The true Light that lights in the darkness descends to us. However, if the filth of sin covers our hearts, it darkens the brilliance of our light².

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa

❖ Anyone who originates from nothingness does not possess the power to progress. However, the rays of the

Light that proceeds from men is granted to them when they become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Thus, when they become the image of the divine nature they are called lights and each becomes a light.

❖ Since the Son is the splendor (rays) of the glory of God the Father, He is consequently the true Light.

❖ Since the mind of man is considered a lamp, and this is how the Psalm refers to it: **“You will light my lamp”**; then why is it said that we are light? Because a lamp receives its light from another source. Since the only Son is the sole One who shines in the darkness that is within us then He is the true Light; while we are definitely not the true light.

❖ If the Son is not truly the sole Light, and that this is also a feature of all creatures as well, then how do we explain these words: **“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light,” (1 Peter2: 90)**. So why is there darkness within us? And what is this darkness that we were living in, if we are truly the light?

❖ The Holy Bible frequently speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as the divine Light or the Light of the Father (Ps 4:6; 97:11; 89:15; 112:4; Is 60:1; 42:6; 2:5; Jn 12:35 -36; 1Jn 2:9-10).

St. Cyril the Great

❖ The light of the sun that is visible to us sheds its light upon everything - even upon the smallest and least significant animals. Similarly, righteousness and wisdom are the true Light, and the mind may be blocked and clouded from perceiving this Light and it gets confused as a result of some prevalent anger. Just like the sun that sets down upon man’s anger, so is the case with this ship when the Lord is absent from it. Everyone shakes as a result of his own storms, wickedness, and evil desires³.

¹ Hom. 8 PG 59:48.

² On Virginity, 11.

³ Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 25:5.

❖ The Lord Himself shone as gloriously as the sun. His clothes became white as snow, He Himself shone as the sun. Thus He indicated that He is the Light who gives light to every man who comes into the world. Just as the sun is important to the physical eye, so is the Lord vital to the eyes of the heart¹.

St. Augustine

❖ A righteous and enlightened person enjoys constant daylight throughout his life. His light cannot be touched by darkness. He gives praise to God seven times a day for he has sublimated himself above this world that has been created in six days. When I attain the Lord's Paradise, and contemplate on the reason for the creation and God's wisdom, I acknowledge that His rulings are altogether justice.

St. Didymium, the Blind

'He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him', [10].

This is so amazing! He has created the world through his power, and He has descended to it to be in our midst. He sends His Light to us and to be within us. However, the evil world has rejected Him and chosen to walk in the darkness of ignorance rather than in the light of knowing Him.

If a person walks in darkness, he cannot justify himself. His darkness is not caused by His Creator. It arises out of his evil will and actions which have rejected the true Light.

❖ St. John speaks of the Lord and says: **'He was in the world, and the world was made through Him....'** By these words, the Evangelist carries us upwards too. He leads us beyond all time and into the presence of the only One. Anyone who hears that the world was made through Him is obliged to acknowledge, confess and worship Him. Even though a person could be extremely insensitive, or hostile, or waging war against the glory of God.

St. John says: **'...and the world did not know Him,'** for there are those who have deviated and cannot perceive distinctions. They have wrestled and become wild to the greatest extent; while there are others who have come to know Him.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ **'...and the world did not know Him,'**: not because He is unknown but because the world is weak. The Son shines, yet the creation disperses the blessing. The Word granted the creation the power of sight so that all may perceive, through nature, that He is Lord. However, the creation has abused that gift and has turned all living things into stumbling blocks that obstruct meditation on the Lord. Creatures have become egocentric and have buried the gift of insight through negligence.

❖ Truly, the world is condemned for its ingratitude, and its inability to comprehend God...the Prophet expresses this reality as he quotes these verses in reference to the children of Israel: **'So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes,' (Is 5:4).**

St. Cyril the Great

❖ The world that the Lord has created is not the same one that has not known Him.

¹ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 28:2.*

What is the world that He has created? The heavens and the earth.

How is it that the heavens did not know Him whereas the sun grew dark as He suffered on the Cross?

How is it that the earth did not know Him whereas it rumbled and shook as he hung on the Cross?

‘The world did not know Him,’ as we are told about its ruler the following: **‘...for the ruler of this world is coming and he has nothing in Me,’** (Jn 14:30). The evil ones and the unbelievers are called ‘the world’: they are named after the thing they have loved.

By loving God, we become gods; and by loving the world, we become ‘the world.’ However, ‘... God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,’ (2 Cor 5: 19).

❖ All things witness to Him in every way, yet who were those who did not acknowledge Him? They are those who became known as ‘the world’ on account of their love for it¹.

❖ The world was created by Him: the heavens, the earth, and all that is in them. Yet **‘the world did not know Him.’** Those who love the world, and hate the Lord: this is the world that did not know Him. For the world is evil since those who have preferred the world to God are truly evil².

❖ **‘...and the world did not know Him,’**: this is not the world that we are told about: **‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,’** (2 Cor 5:19). There is an evil world, as well as a godly world. The evil world consists of the evil ones in it, and the godly world consists of the godly ones. This is what we often notice in a field as we say: ‘This field is full of good seeds,’ or ‘This field is full of weeds.’ Similarly, we may say that a certain tree is full of fruit while another may say that it is full of leaves. In each case both sayings are true, for the fact that it is full of leaves does not negate that it is full of fruit; neither does its being full of fruit negate that it is full of leaves.³

❖ The world is evil because its inhabitants are evil; just as a house is evil not due to its walls but due to its inhabitants⁴.

‘He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him,’ [11].

God has not created man to serve Him for He has no need for the services of mankind. His unique love for mankind, He wants each to be His very own and part of His household. According to Genesis 5:24: **‘...Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.’** Although we do not know how God took him, or where He took him, yet he was removed to be with God forever and to be welcomed as one of the members of the divine family.

The Lord shows His supreme love for believers by relating Himself to them in these words: **‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’** The prophet Moses reveals this relationship as one where God considers a congregation as His own personal portion: **...the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.’** (Gen 7:6). This thought has often been voiced by many prophets as they proclaim that God reserved a people to be His own.

And the Word incarnated descended to live among His own; yet His own did not receive Him. The rejection was a joint one as it came from the high priests, the

¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 2:11*

² *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 46:5*

³ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons 31:3*

⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate*

scribes, the Pharisees, and the leaders of the people. Even one of His disciples joined and rejected Him, and thus these words were fulfilled: **‘...and those who hated me wrongfully have multipliedwho hate me without a cause,’** (Ps 39:19; Ps 69:4).
 ❖ The Lord heard the prayers of the prophets and was concerned that mankind would be annihilated. Consequently, He sent His Son from heaven as a Healer. According to the prophet: **‘ And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come...,’**(Mal3: 1)...where? **‘...to His temple’!** Another prophet, on hearing that, says: **‘O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain...say to the cities of Judah....’** Say what? **‘Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand,’** (Isaiah 40:9, 10). Moreover, the Lord Himself declares: **“...behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,”** (Zech 2:10). Nevertheless, the Israelites rejected salvation and consequently He **“will gather all nations and all tongues,”** (Isaiah 66:18). For **‘ He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.’** Lord, You will come, and what will you grant to the Gentiles? **“...I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory. I will set a sign among them...”** (Isaiah 66: 19). For when I have been crucified, I grant all my soldiers a seal on their foreheads¹.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Reflect on the words of St. John: **‘He came to His own’:** not because the Lord needed them since it is inconceivable that the Divine entity would be in need; but He came to extend goodwill to His own people.

St. John emphasizes his admonition to those Jews more poignantly as he says: **‘ ...and His own rejected Him.’** For although the Lord came for their well-being yet they rejected Him. And not only that, but they also threw Him out of the vineyard and killed Him

St. John Chrysostom

‘ But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,..’[12].

He had come to His own yet His own rejected Him; yet in the midst of them a few faithful ones were found who received Him. These were driven out of the synagogue and were forbidden to worship in the temple. They were treated as though they were heathen and not as disciples of Moses nor as the children of Abraham, etc...The Jews did not realize that these few were the sacred yeast for the firstborn in the heavenly Church: this was the source of joy for Moses and the rejoicing of Abraham and Jacob. These would serve in the new Temple, and join the congregation of the saints and heavenly hosts.

In the early days, the Lord had called His people **‘Israel...My Son. My firstborn’** (Ex 4:22). And now this yeast has occupied that ultimate rank through God’s adoption: they have become **‘partakers of the divine nature,’**(2 Peter 1:4).

❖ The Lord has adopted the slaves and made them brothers. He ransomed the exiled and granted them to be partners in His inheritance².

❖ If they are children of God; if they have been redeemed by the grace of the Savior; if they have been bought by His precious Blood; if they have been born from water and the Holy Spirit; and if they have been appointed to inherit the kingdom of heaven; then they are truly the children of God³.

¹ *Essay 12:8.*

² *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 53:2*

³ *Sermon on N.T.Lessons31: 6*

❖ “The heirs of God are heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ.” He has no fear of having others sharing in the inheritance; since His inheritance will not diminish if many others come into it. Indeed, these will become part of His inheritance; and He in turn will become their inheritance. Listen to the means by which they have become an inheritance for Him: **‘The Lord has said to Me, “You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give the nations for Your inheritance”,’** (Ps 2:7,8). And listen to the means by which He becomes an inheritance for them: the Psalmist says: **“ You O Lord are the portion of my cup and my inheritance** (Ps 16:5). Let us attain Him, and may He possess us as our Lord. May we attain Him as our Salvation and Light. What does He grant to those who receive Him? **‘He gave them the right to be His children, even to those who believe in His name,’** so that they may cling to the Wood and cross the sea⁴.

❖ Do not be astonished, O man, that you have become a son through grace, and have been born of God according to His Word. For, initially, the Word first chose to be born of man in order that you could be born of God according to the plan of redemption. Hence, tell yourself: “It is not without reason that God wanted to be born of man, for He considered me so important and desired to make me immortal: for my sake, He was born as a man who is vulnerable to death¹.”

St. Augustine

❖ Just as the Lord Jesus Christ is a true Son, so we also become children of God when we receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Bible says: **‘For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption,’**(Romans 8:15). Since we have become children through the power of the Holy Spirit, it is clear that in our Lord Jesus Christ we are called the children of God: **‘...as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God,’** (Jn 1:12).

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

❖ However, adoption rests upon us, that is it is dependent on ‘our willingness.’ St. John elaborates by saying that many **‘received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believed in His name.’** That indicates that they were not the children of God before they believed. However, by choosing to believe they are qualified to become His children².

❖ He is not similar to you who have become enlightened and thereby have become children of God...thus you are children by adoption according to that which is written: **‘...as many as received Him, He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.’** Truly, we have been born by the water and the Spirit, but Jesus Christ was not born from the Father in this way. At the time of His baptism, God spoke to Him, saying: **“This is My Son,”** (Matt 3:17). He did not say, “ He has become My Son” but rather: ‘This is My Son.’ Thus God proclaimed that He is the **‘Son’** even before baptism³.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ If you ask: what have those who accepted Him received? I will answer: It is in the

⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 2: 13*

¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 2:15*

² *Essay 7:13*

³ *Essay 11:9*

words of the Evangelist: **‘...as many as received Him, He gave the right to become children of God.’** The Evangelist explains this good gift that God grants to those who receive the Lord and underlined them in a few words: **‘He gave the right to become children of God’**: whether they were slaves or free men, heathen or wise or foolish, whether women or children, elderly, rich or poor, leaders or common people: all become qualified to receive the same blessing. Who could be similarly just and benevolent to mankind?

In spite of that, not everyone is granted that grace: it is only granted to those who want to receive it, and to those who persevere to attain it. Those have the power because they have been offered to become children; and had they rejected the offer, grace would not pursue them or work in them. Granting grace is a gift from God, but receiving faith is up to man.

❖ Why did the Evangelist not say: ‘He made them children of God rather than **‘to them He gave the right to become the children of God’?** To clarify that we need great zeal to maintain the image of adoption which has been impressed upon us at the time we were baptized. This occurs by keeping ourselves free of impurity and depravity. Besides, no one can seize that power from us unless we first deprive ourselves from it. He who has delivered this grace into our hands is greater and higher than all. At the same time, he wants to show that grace does not descend on man without his will, but rather fills those who have desire and toil for its sake. Consequently, it becomes in their power to become God’s children. Had they not chosen that for themselves, grace would neither have descended upon them, nor would it have acted within them ¹.

St. John Chrysostom

‘...who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God’ [13].

For a Gentile to be accepted as one of them, the Jews used to demand that he fulfill three requirements: circumcision, baptism, and presenting a sacrificial offering. By doing so, he would be considered as born again and a member of God’s people and worthy to enjoy the divine covenant. However, the Jews of Egypt neglected circumcision and could not be saved from bondage under Pharaoh. They could not enjoy being born again unless they would be circumcised and would offer the blood of the Passover. It appears to be necessary that their blood would mingle with the blood of the lamb in order to be sanctified, saved, and born again. However, when the only begotten Son of God came, He offered mankind to be sons of God, Who adopts them, by a spiritual birth blessed by the Water and the Spirit.

St. John, the Evangelist, reveals the action of the Word in the life of man. He presents Him as the Creator by Whom all things were made. Then, he clarifies that He is the ‘Life’ Who grants life. This is the true Life that shines on man to make him enjoy the light whose source is the true Light. Through this insight God reveals Himself to man who consequently has faith in Him. This faith is accompanied by a new spiritual birth through the Water and the Spirit. It is a new birth granted by the Spirit of God, and through it we become the first born of the new creation and the living yeast for the Gentiles: **‘Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures,’**(James 1; 18).

It is a birth that is unique in its kind as it is not the fruit of natural elements. It neither proceeds from blood or from physical instincts. It is neither the result of a physical

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 10:2*

will nor achieved through a human plan. Indeed, it is a heavenly birth coming from God on high. It is a birth from God in which the natural element of blood has no share. It is free from all natural instincts, human ability or human planning. In the Greek version, the word 'blood' occurs in the plural and not in the singular to indicate reference to the bloods of the father and mother. It does not refer to the Jewish 'blood'; for they boasted that they descended from the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of the blood of the chosen people.

This new birth is an issue of great value to St. John: **'Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God!'** (1 Jn 3:1). **'If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him,'** (1 Jn 2: 29). **'We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him,'** (1 Jn 5: 18).

❖ They have been born of Adam as a necessary process (and they had no choice in that)...but they are born of the Lord Jesus Christ through their own will and through grace.

Mankind is not obligated to be born from the Lord Jesus Christ.

They have not been born of Adam as a result of their own wish. In any case, all those who have been born of Adam are sinners bound by sin; whereas those born of the Lord Jesus Christ have become righteous through Him and not through their own power...

Death was the penalty of sin, and in the Lord was the gift of mercy and not a penalty of sin...

There was no blemish in Him that deserved the decree of His death, yet in spite of that He died. In your case, you have faults, so do you reject death? ...

You have died through Adam; therefore arise through the Lord Jesus Christ: both are tasks to which you have to submit.

You believe in the Lord now, therefore do not rebound to what is necessary through Adam.

The bonds of sin will not pursue you forever because the temporary death of your Lord has slaughtered your eternal death.

This applies to grace and to the truth, my brothers; for the Lord has promised both and has revealed them¹.

❖ As mankind is granted the power to become children of God they are born of Him. Note that they are born of Him and are **'... born, not of blood,'** as in the case of their first birth. The first is a miserable birth arising from misery. As for those born of God, what were they before that? What were they born of the first time? Of blood and from the union of the blood of a male and female: from physical union between a male and female. That is what they were born of.

What are they born of now? Of God.

The first birth proceeds from a male and a female, and the second proceeds from God and the Church².

❖ They had been born, but they became born of God. The water of baptism is the uterus of their mother³.

❖ Do not imagine that becoming children of God is such a tremendous issue. He Who is the Son of God became the Son of man on your behalf. If He has become of a lesser stature, He Who was much more; can He not transform that which is lower - that is

¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 3: 13*

² *Sermon on N.T., 70: 4*

³ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 69: 4*

ourselves - so that we may become of greater stature?

He descended to us, can we not ascend to Him?

For us He accepted our death, will He not give us His life?

For your sakes, He carried your shortcomings; will He not grant you good blessings? ⁴

❖ He works in this way to allow us to contemplate on the condition of our first birth and its humiliation as it arises from the will of the flesh and blood. We then become aware of the high rank of our second birth through baptism and the honor associated with it since its source is the grace of God. Consequently, we will be greatly cautious to be worthy of the gift granted to us by Him Who gave us this birth. Moreover, we will show great jealousy in the future, as we will be terrified to stain our beautiful garment. This could happen due to negligence or sin and then we would be driven out of the inner circle of the wedding - just like the unwise virgins, or like the one who was not dressed wedding clothes (Matt 22:12).

2- THE WORD BECAME FLESH

The mystery of all ages is that the divine eternal Word became incarnate. The divine united with the flesh and became one of us. Anyone who saw or touched Him saw the glory of the only begotten Son of His Father. This is according to the witness of St. John the Baptist [15] who enjoyed grace and truth [17].

‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,’[14].

What a great way of presenting the Person of the Word as being in the Father and residing with Him even before all time. He is one in essence with the Father and the Creator of all things in heaven and on earth. He is the Giver of life, and the true Light that shines upon those sitting in the darkness. He lifts them up so that they may receive the blessing of by God the Father’s adoption. Now, and for the last time, the Evangelist will mention the name of **the Word** since He has become incarnate and has entered the world of mankind. The incarnation has not happened through a revelation, a dream, or the appearance of a strange guest. Rather, the Word came as a real and perfect person living among His younger brothers. He became incarnate to hide the magnificence of His divinity, which no human eye could gaze at. Yet, through that mystery, He opens the door of knowledge and perception. These allow the believer to enjoy God’s adoption and to get acquainted with His Divine mysteries. He does not wish to leave us hindered by the veil of the body and ignore His reality. That is why He says: **“...blessed is he who is not offended because of Me,”(Matt 11:6).**

St. John Chrysostom likens fallen mankind to an adulterous woman. Then the heavenly bridegroom comes disguised in the flesh so that she is not scared and runs away from Him. Rather, she meets Him and enjoys reconciliation with the Father. She accepts union with her heavenly bridegroom as she gets acquainted with His mysteries, and soars with Him into His heavens.

The Word became a person in order to encompass mankind within Him and consequently enable man to enjoy the divine proclamation and divine knowledge.

This occurs as a result of union, closeness, and experience.

For our sakes, He dismantled Himself from any visible divine glory. According to St. Paul: **‘...who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men,’** (Phil. 2: 7,8). This dismantling did not result in a

⁴ Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 69:5

change in His divine features since the divinity that united with his humanity did not mingle together. But through the incarnation, the Word became a full and real person while He is the Divine almighty God. In this manner, He opened before us the door to the Holy of Holies: **‘ Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated to us through the veil, that is, His flesh...,’** (Heb 10:19-20).

‘...and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth....’

With the above words, St. John the Evangelist carries us upwards into the sphere of divinity where we feel completely incapable of comprehending the mysteries of the divine Word. However, he does not leave us in this state as he does not wish us to despair. Hence, he recapitulates to proclaim that the Word became flesh. He became very close and accessible to us. We can see, touch, and hear Him. Moreover, we can enjoy fellowship and share in His life.

As we contemplate on the Son of Man, we see Him, who is the Word of God, carrying the Cross. In this way, He condemned sin through the flesh as He offers it as a sacrificial offering for sin. It is done for the redemption of the world and for His glory. We see Him on the Cross at the hour of His invisible glory. Thus He carries us, through the Cross, to the embrace of His Father: we become the sanctified and glorified children of God. We have become partakers of the divine nature.

This amazing, crucified Body that has risen from the dead is the mystery explaining our steadfast adherence to Him Who is our glory, and our eternal life. He offers It to us constantly through the mystery of the Eucharist: for the remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of It.

❖ Let us listen to the words of the holy Gospels and to St. John the Evangelist: **‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’** St. John goes on to say: **‘...And the Word became flesh....’** It is not right to worship an ordinary human being or to say that the Lord Jesus Christ is God only and thereby denying His incarnation. If He is God, then this is the truth; but if we say that He did not become incarnated, then redemption would be a foreign concept to us. Therefore let us worship Him as the God of those who believe in His incarnation. There is no gain from saying that He is a human being and not God; or what kind of redemption do we obtain if we reject admitting His humanity as well as His divinity? Let us confess His presence for He is King and Physician. The Lord Jesus Christ, the King, became our physician as He put on the garment of our flesh and healed what had become sick.

The perfect Teacher of babes became a babe among them (Romans 2:20), so that He might give wisdom to the ignorant. The Bread of life descended to the earth so that He might feed the hungry!¹

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ Having proclaimed that those who receive Him are born of God and become His children, the Evangelist explains the condition and the reason for this astonishing honor: **‘...the Word became flesh,’** [14], for the Lord took the image of a slave. He who is the Son of God became the Son of Man so that the children of men might become children of God.

If the Almighty meets with that which is of lower rank, His honor is not degraded. Indeed, He lifts up the degraded from their utter humiliation. That is how things

¹ Essay 12:1

worked out with the Lord.

His nature was in no way degraded by His humiliation. Indeed, he lifted us up into an amazing glory- we who were constantly residing in shame and in darkness.

This is what happens when a king speaks to a poor person with concern and tenderness. This does not tarnish the king with any shame. Moreover, everyone would look upon him with concern and respect².

When you hear that ‘...**the word became flesh,**’ do not be disturbed and do not fall. The Lord Jesus Christ was not transformed from His essence into a body. Such thoughts are blasphemous and atheist. He remained the same in essence and additionally took on the image of a slave.

If you were to ask: Then why has the Evangelist used the word ‘...**became...**’ My answer would be that it served to stop the mouths of the propagators of inventions. Since there are people who say that God’s plans were altogether figments of the imagination and an obsession, the Evangelist added these words ‘...**and the Word became flesh.**’ He does so in order to stop, from the early stage of writing, their blasphemous words; and to indicate that He took on a real body...

St. John Chrysostom

‘**He dwelt**’, or ‘resided’ for ‘skeenoso’ in Greek, means constructing a temporary accommodation or tent for a shelter. This is relevant when speaking of the human aspect of the Lord. The Tabernacle or the Ark was symbol for that in the Old Testament. It is a lodge that could suffer death, yet it does not split away from His divinity. This term is also used in Greek to refer to a building that is used for events and celebrations. Hence, the incarnation of the Lord has transformed our lives into an everlasting celebration.

Since man’s heart has become attached to the world, he has imagined that his residence in it is eternal. As a result, he is no longer able to soar, with his heart or thoughts or feelings, beyond the limitations of the earth and of time. However, God proclaimed His yearning to live among men since early times. He wanted them to have a taste of the Creator of heaven and earth and consequently desire to fly to Him and live with Him. In the days of Moses, ‘...**the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting and the glory of God filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting...**’ (Ex 40 34-35). In the age of the prophets, the Lord proclaims: “**Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,**” says the Lord (Zech 2:10). In the land of captivity, where the people lost the promised land as a home, the Lord promised not only to bring them back to live in Canaan but also to make within them a holy dwelling place for Him. This would be better than an earthly place: “**My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people,**” (Ezekiel 37:27).

صفحتان لم تترجما ص 124-125

The mother of any person, whoever he may be, becomes pregnant through a physical union. Everyone is born from two human parents: from a father and a mother. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He was born of the Holy Spirit and St. Mary, the holy virgin. He came to us but He was not separated from His own Self (His divinity). Yes, His

² *Homilies on St. John, Hom.11: 1*

own Self being God will not be split but He took what belongs to our nature. He came to something that He was not like, and He did not lose what He was like. He became the Son of Man, and He did not cease to be the Son of God... He did not come to us as someone who leaves the Father. He also departed from us but He has not left us. And He will come back to us again but He will not leave the Father¹.

❖ So that we may get to see Him, if we still cannot see God the Word, let us listen ‘...**the Word became flesh...**’ and remember that we are flesh. Therefore, let us listen to the incarnated Word who came to serve this end. Besides, it is for this reason that He bore our weaknesses: so that we might accept the powerful words of God, carrying our weakness.

It has truly been called the ‘milk’, for He gives milk to the babes in order to offer the meal of wisdom (the flesh) to those who are mature.

May you feed patiently now in order to refresh the desire of your heart that is filled with eagerness...

Since babes lack sufficient power that would enable them to eat the meat placed upon the table, what does the mother do? She transforms the meat ‘incarnate’ to the matter of her body and transforms it into milk. She transforms it into an element that we are able to take.

In the same way, the Word became incarnated so that we, being truly like babes regarding food, can be refreshed by the milk.

However, there is a difference: the mother transforms the food by turning the meat into milk, and the food into milk. As for the Word that lived by Himself, He became flesh without undergoing any change so that He might appear as one texture made up of both².

❖ Let us first comprehend the degree to which God has humbled Himself. Hence, let us degrade ourselves and become humble for our own benefit. Let us raise our eyes to the Lord Jesus Christ Who also humbly debased Himself for our sakes and not for His own benefit...

Confess your weakness, and kneel before the Physician patiently.

When you comprehend the degree to which He debased Himself you rise with Him, not raising Himself being the Word, but merely by us realizing Him more and more. He doesn’t increase, but you advance. Consequently, He seems to be elevated with you...

Behold a tree: first, its roots shoot downwards so that it might grow upwards. It establishes its roots underground so that it might stretch its trunk to the sky. Can you strive to grow except by practicing humility? Then, may the Lord Jesus Christ ‘**dwell’ in your hearts; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be filled with all the fullness of God...**’ (Eph. 3: 17-19)¹.

❖ Believe that in this flesh the Son of God partook fully of our nature. In other words, He possessed the same reasoning self and the mortal body like ours, except that He was without sin. He partook of our weaknesses but not of our wickedness. Thus, by sharing our weaknesses, He has power to release the bonds of our wickedness and lead us into His righteousness. He had to drink of the same cup of death as ours and so He filled it with the Life that He possessed².

¹ Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 71:5.

² Sermon on the N.T. Lessons, 67:16

¹ Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67:18

² Letters, 39.

❖ He existed before His body existed. He created and chose His mother out of whom He would be made. He created the one who would bring Him into the world (according to the flesh). So why are you astonished? For I am speaking to you about God: **‘...and the Word was God....’**

I am speaking about the Word, that is our Lord; and he bears some resemblance to the word spoken by mankind. However, the similarity is far from being an equivalent one and there is no point of comparison. At the same time, there is something that may imply a certain degree of similarity. Indeed, the words that I pronounce were in my heart. They reached you yet they did not leave me. It begins to be with you while it was not in you. And it continues to be with me while it went out to you.

Hence, just as my word came to you while it did not get separated from my heart, so the Word has touched our senses while it has not become separated from the Father. The word was with me and it took the form of a voice. The Word of God was with the Father and It took the form of a Body. But can I do with my voice what (GOD) can do with His Body? I am not master over my voice when it is emitted, whereas He is Master not only over His Body- to be born, live and act, - but also, when he died - to raise and glorify It in the Father. The Body is the vessel that carries Him and came to us in It ³.

St. Augustine

❖ The Word became flesh to allow us to cross over from the flesh into the living Word. The Word did not cease to remain in Its original state (The Word), just as human nature did not change when He put it on through birth⁴.

St. Jerome

‘John bore witness of Him and cried out saying, “This is He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me,” [15].

As St. John begins to reveal the work of the incarnated Word of God, he presents the testimony of St. John the Baptist. Although He came after him, yet He existed before him. Accordingly, Jesus says **“...before Abraham was, I AM,”**(Jn 8: 58). This is because this testimony is fundamental and of great importance. Hence the Evangelist says: **‘John bore witness of Him and cried....’** The word **‘cried’** expresses the action of shouting aloud to attract attention to his proclamation for, it has to do with the life of mankind, its redemption and glorification.

Shouting and giving witness occurred earlier when his mother, Elizabeth, recognized the incarnated Word within the womb of the virgin St. Mary. St. John the Baptist was still in his mother’s womb, when the Virgin Mary went to visit Elizabeth, and St. Luke reports the event in these words: **‘...and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke with a loud voice and said: “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”** (Lk 1:41-42).

The Lord Jesus Christ has been called **‘the Son of the Highest’ (Lk 1:32); while John was called ‘ the prophet of the Highest’ (Lk 1: 76).** John was a servant of the ‘new covenant’, while Jesus is the Mediator of the ‘new covenant.’ John was a great person, and he had a great name and mission: it’s him who prepared the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. Like all the other prophets, he sits at the feet of God to learn and to receive revelations. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He exists in the embrace of the Father (Eph 3:11).

St. John the Baptist is the voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the

³ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 69:7*

⁴ *Against Jovinianus, 2:29*

Lord Jesus Christ (Is 40:30).

‘...for He was before me,’ since He has created me and brought me to life. He is the First, and this is a title that belongs to God as He is the ‘beginning and the end’ (1 Cor 1:17;). He is the Everlasting One (Mi 5: 2).

❖ St. John the Evangelist says the following about St. John the Baptist: ‘**John bore witness of Him and cried out saying....**’ In other words, John proclaimed boldly and loudly, as he was free of all despair.

St. John the Baptist did not proclaim that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God or the true Son. Rather, he proclaimed that: “**This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’**” This is analogous to mother birds who do not teach their young immediately or in one day the whole manner of flying. They would take their chicks out sometimes and at others just let them rest. Then on the following day, they would take them to fly for a much longer period than that of the previous day. In this manner the little ones are eventually led to fly to the desired heights. Similarly, John the Baptist led the Jews to fly and soar above the earth gradually, rather than leading them immediately to sublime concepts.

St. John Chrysostom

‘And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.’[16]

St. Cyril the Great, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine all agree that these words are not intended to complement the testimony of St. John the Baptist. Rather, they are the words of St. John the Evangelist who wishes to proclaim that He who is filled with grace and truth [14] is the secret of fulfillment of the whole Church. He is the Source of grace that never dries up, the overflowing love that bursts forth constantly. Due to His eternal and perfect fullness, His grace overflows upon His Church so that each of her members may enjoy having and partaking of the Divine nature.

He is the Source of all blessings, and He fills our treasuries (Prov 8:12). We receive from Him all grace just as the riverbeds receive water from the sources. Divine blessings are the grace or *grotius*, that means free gifts (Rom.12: 6). That is because the Father is pleased with the Son, and consequently is pleased with us in Him (Eph 1:6).

‘...and grace for grace.’ Every gift is a talent that God gives us. We need to trade with it and gain another gift or talent (1Peter14: 10).

‘...and grace for grace.’ This indicates that the gift of God continues to flow on us constantly for God does not give the Spirit by measure’ (Jn 3:34). It ‘pleased the Father that in Him all fullness should dwell’ (Col 1:19) since the Lord Jesus Christ, is the incarnated Word. He is, therefore the sole One with unlimited fullness; and has power to fill each one according to his own measure. That is what Paul, the apostle, conveys in his words: “For in Him dwells all fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power,”(Col 2:9-10). Also read: “...the fullness of Him who fills all” (Eph 1:23); and “...that you may be filled with all the fullness of God,” (Eph 3: 19); and our terminal goal in Jesus Christ is “...till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to the perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...”(Eph 4:13).

❖ Since He is the true light that shines within each person, then He also enlightened and informed St. John who affirmed and confessed that truly ‘...of His fullness we

have all received' [16].¹

❖ After stating that **'of His fullness we have all received,'** St. John adds: “...**and grace for grace**” (Jn 1: 16). The Jews were saved through grace and according to the Lord's words: “I have chosen you not because you are many in number but because of your fathers.” If God chose them but not because of their good works, then it is clear that they have received this dignity through grace. We too are redeemed through grace. Yet we are redeemed in a different manner and for a different purpose: we are redeemed in a manner that is far greater and more sublime. Consequently, the grace we have received is not the same as theirs. That is because He has granted us not only redemption from sin (for we are their partners and all have sinned), but we have been granted righteousness, sanctification, adoption, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have received these in a more generous and glorifying manner.²

St. Augustine

❖ I believe that He has existed before me, and that He enjoys greater honor with the Father than I do. That is because the prophets who came before me and I have received a great and prophetic divine grace proceeding from His Fullness. Truly, the gift we have received from Him is that of free will.³

Origen

❖ What is the implication of the words: “**And of His fullness we have all received**”?... He says that He does not own this grace because He is a partner; but He owns it since He is Himself the Source and the origin of all goodness. He is Life itself, Truth itself, bearing within Himself, the richness of His righteousness, rather He overflows on others. At the same time this fullness continues and does not diminish as it reaches out to others. Indeed, He constantly keeps overflowing and grants others fellowship of His blessings. He remains as perfect as ever. What I receive is granted through fellowship (that is I receive from someone else. I receive a small share of the total. To me from others, It is as a pitiable drop of water when compared to an infinite downpour or sea. This example cannot really convey fully what we intend to explain...let us imagine a source of fire, and from that source we kindle hundreds of lanterns...doesn't the fire remain the same in its power and fullness, even though it has offered what it possesses to all those lanterns? It becomes clear to everyone that this is true.⁴

St. John Chrysostom

❖ He who grants us grace has also granted us the Law. However, He had delivered the Law through His servants, whereas He Himself descended to deliver grace. What are the means used to bring mankind under the Law? Their disobedience led them to be subject to the Law; for those who obey do not become subject to it since they agree with it. As for those subjugated by the Law, they remain sentenced by it and do not get relieved.

If the Law subjugates all mankind, they become condemned by it. It hangs over their heads, and reveals their sins without showing any mercy.

The Law issues commands, and the Giver of the Law understands concerning its implications. However, mankind fails when they attempt to depend on their own

¹ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 17;9*

² *In John hom. 14:2.*

³ *Commentar, on John, Book 6:35*

⁴ *Homilies on St. John, Hom 14:1.*

power to conform to the Law and its commandments. This is due to their bold stubbornness and rashness. They have become guilty as they are not in agreement with it and therefore have become sentenced by it. As a result, they plead and pray to the Giver of the Law for help. On account of guilt feelings experienced under the law, the proud become sick. Consequently, their sickness becomes a confession before the humble ones.

Now, the sick confess their illness, so that the physician may come and heal them. Who is the physician? He is the Lord Jesus Christ.¹

❖ What does “...**grace for grace**,” mean? This involves faith; for God once more becomes our defender and seeks our benefit. As we are unworthy to be forgiven we received such a great gift and this is what is called grace. What is grace? That which is granted freely...for you receive a gift from God: a gift of life through faith; with the promise of eternity and life everlasting as a reward. That is grace!²

St. Augustine

‘For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ [17].

The Law in itself is a great blessing and it comes from God. It is intended to prepare the way for the gift of the Gospel. However, there is no point of comparison between the shadow and the Truth. The Truth offers a bounty of blessings: He enriches the poor with heavenly treasures, frees the slave from the power of Satan, carries believers on His Divine Hands in the midst of their sufferings, grants continuous knowledge concerning the divine mysteries, grants power to confront weaknesses, and pours His glory within us in times of humiliation. He has delivered the Law to us, with all its commandments, duties, and prophecies to function as shadows or semi-divine gifts. In contrast, the Lord Jesus Christ has brought us into the depth of the commandments in order to acquaint us with the Creator of heavens Himself hidden behind it. He has carried us so that, as we worship Him, we may experience, through the Holy Spirit, heavens itself. That is where He came from, and that is how we can live His heavenly life.

Origen, wonders: ‘If the Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed that He is the Truth (Jn 14:6), then how has **truth come through Him**? This is his answer: All of God’s blessings in the Old Testament are symbols of the gift of the New Testament which is **‘Truth.’** That explains why the glory of the New Testament is greater than that of the Old Testament (2 Cor 3: 10). Hence the discovery of grace has become easier, and its distribution has become more generous. It is in this way that we have obtained the grace of the New Testament as a substitute for the grace of the Old Testament. This is not to say that one opposes the other, but to indicate that the New Testament fulfills the Old and perfects and affirms it within our hearts. As we are changed into the image of God and move from glory to glory, and from one rank to a higher rank (1 Cor 3:18).

The grace we receive is more like a brand that shapes and **conforms us into icons of the Lord Jesus Christ. As such, we continue to grow in a pronounced manner (Romans 8:29).** Hence we become heavenly icons (1Cor 15:49).

As we enjoy the Lord Jesus Christ, we receive grace and truth. That is so because He is the Source of grace and the treasury of wisdom. Indeed, He who is truth and grace offers Himself to us so that we might enjoy Him

In the Old Testament, we received the Law in an atmosphere of terror (Heb 12:18). In

¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 3:2-3*

² St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. Jon, tractate 3:9*

contrast, we receive the New Testament in an atmosphere of grace: the promises declared in the Old Testament become fulfilled in the New Testament. They are coupled with mercy and truth and according to God's promises. Having tasted and enjoyed the grace of God, we become more thirsty and wish to receive more. This is because every grace within us calls for more and attracts it to our inner depths. Hence our depths become the target to an endless flow of coordinated divine blessings.

❖ The Law was delivered through God's servants, and it sentenced mankind as sinners. Now pardon came from the Emperor, and redeemed sinners¹.

St. Augustine

❖ In any case, truth comes to mankind through the Lord Jesus Christ. It came in this way to St. Paul and to the apostles. It is not strange to state that although the sole Truth exists, yet from Him flows, as it were, many other truths. For instance, the prophet and king, David, knew many truths; and he says: '----- (Ps 30: 24). For the Father of truth demands many truths of those who possess them and thereby are redeemed².

Origen

❖ Note the great difference between 'was given' and 'came'... the first instance implies an object to be served such as when a person receives an object and delivers it to someone according to an order to do so. In the second instance '...**grace and truth came...**' are appropriately used to convey that it is the King Himself Who has power to forgive sins and to grant grace³.

At the time of the war with Amalek in Sinai, Moses' hands were supported by Aaron and Hur, who stood beside him (Exod 17:12). But when Christ came, He stretched His hands on the cross by Himself. Don't you notice how the Law was given, but Truth came.

❖ **'No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him' [18].**

We might be correct in saying that this statement is considered the conclusion of the introductory section to the Gospel of St. John. It introduces us to the Divine Word as the Divine Person Who is united and consubstantial with the Father in essence: He has become incarnated for our sakes. Therefore here the two truths are connected: He is the eternal Word and He became a true human being for the sake of mankind.

Since He is the true Word and the only begotten Son, then He alone sees the Father for He has existed in the same essence with Him. No other being on earth or in heaven can occupy such a status. There is no point of comparison between Him and Abraham-the father of fathers, or Moses who received the commandments, or any other prophet. There is also no point of comparison between Him and any of the heavenly ranks.

Moses, who is great among the prophets saw 'the form of the Lord...' (Numbers 12:8) yet he was unable to see His face (Ex 33:20).

He is the only true Son Who resides within the embrace of the Father and is never separate from Him. He is the reason for His Father's joy, and He has power to proclaim Him and reveal His divine mysteries and sublime plans. Consequently, it is

¹ St. Augustine; *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 3:15.*

² *Hom. 14 PG 59:83*

³ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.14:4*

the Lord Jesus Christ Who has clearly declared to us the Father, Who was never seen by anyone. This is a gift and grace and this is divine truth that we have come to possess through the Lord Jesus Christ: this is **'knowledge.'**

God is a Spirit, and the body cannot perceive Him. That is why the Son became incarnate; in order to grant us the new spiritual birth that would enable us to perceive Him Who is invisible (Heb ...), and to live through Him. He alone will open the seals (Rev 5:9) and acquaint us with the mysteries of God.

❖ **'No one has seen God at any time.'**

What about the proclamations in the Old Testament? What do we comment about the voice of **Isaiah the great** who proclaims: '...I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple', [Isaiah 6:1]?

How do we respond to Daniel who says: "I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame. Its wheels a burning fire,"(Daniel 7:9)?

And how do we respond to **Jacob** when he had the vision and was dubbed as Israel, which means 'the one who has seen his God' (Gen 32:28)?

Furthermore, how do we respond to Moses who spoke to God saying: "Please show me your glory" (Exodus 33:18)?

Many others have seen God, so what does St. John intend by saying: **'No one has seen God at any time'**? This is what he wishes to convey: These visions fitted His descent and appearance but did not fit His essence. Had these persons seen the actual nature of the Divine God they could not have really seen Him. For the nature of God cannot ever have a form, it cannot sit, stand, or walk: these are all attributes of bodies.

St. John states that all these were examples relevant to His descent and not a vision of the Essence Himself¹.

Some may object and say: If the essence of the Divine cannot become available to the senses, then why do we speak of these matters?

Well, if I cannot drink the whole river, would that mean that I couldn't drink of it in moderation and as much as it is convenient for me?!

If my eyes are incapable of absorbing all the fullness of the sun's rays, will I not partake as much as I need of it?!

And upon entering a great garden, and I cannot eat all its fruit, do you desire me to leave feeling hungry?!

Therefore, allow me to worship and glorify God, our Creator, as we have been granted the divine command that says:

I now seek to glorify Him without describing Him. Nevertheless, I am aware of my incompetence in fulfilling that task appropriately. Yet, just preserving to achieve that is considered a good exercise and the Lord encourages me in my weakness through St. John's words that say: 'No one has seen God at any time'².

❖ It is impossible for us to see God with our human eye since what is not physical cannot come within the sphere of the physical eye. The only Son has witnessed to this- the Son of God Himself says: 'No one has seen God at any time.' Let us attempt to understand what Ezekiel writes about his vision of God (Ez 28:1)? What does the Holy Bible say? He saw **'the form of the Lord'**, and not God Himself as He is but in the form of His glory. Now, if beholding the form of God's glory filled the prophets with trembling; then surely a person would die if he attempts to see God Himself.

¹ St. John Chrysostom

² Hom 15 PG 59: 85

According to the words of God: "...no man shall see me and live," (Ex.33: 20). That is why in His tender mercy, He has spread the heavens as a veil so that we may not be destroyed. This is not my own interpretation, but it echoes the words of the prophet: "Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence," (Is 64:1).

Why are you astonished to see Daniel fall to the ground upon seeing 'the form of glory'? Note that he fell upon seeing the angel Gabriel although he is only the messenger and servant of God. Yet he trembled, fell upon his face, and was unable to answer the angel although he had appeared to him in the form of a human being...read Daniel 10:9, 16, 18. If the appearance of angels frightened the prophets, then can a person see God as He is and not die?!³

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ St. John says: '**The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father.**' This indicates that the authority of the Son is equal to that of the Father. Because the eternal Father never had in His embrace any other but His own essence, then this saying reveals to us that the Son has always been consubstantial and one with Him since eternity.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The one who perceives is also the one who reports, yet his report does not convey all the grandness of what he perceives. Moreover, he is unable to report all what he knows, but as much as the receivers who are under the sentence of death (mankind), can handle ¹.

St. Jerome

WITNESSES FOR THE INCARNATE WORD

After this wonderful exposition about the **Incarnate Word who is the Giver of grace**, in the rest of Chapter One St. John the Evangelist presents the witnesses for the person of the Lord Jesus Christ:

- **On the first day** [19-28] St. John the Baptist witnesses before the priests and Levites.

- **On the second day** [29-34] he witnesses upon seeing the Lord Jesus Christ.

- **On the third day** [35-39] St. John the Baptist witnesses before two of his disciples.

- **On the fourth day** [40- 42] St. Andrew witnesses before Simon, his brother.

- **On the fifth day** [43-51] St. Philip witnesses before Nathaniel.

-**On the sixth day:** the practical testimony of the water turned into wine (Chapter Two).

Note the following points related to the witnesses that occur during the first week, and which probably took place after the Lord's temptation and return from the wilderness:

First: It is similar to what happened at the beginning of the creation- the world was created in six days, and God rested on the seventh day. In the same way, man's nature is renewed and the week ends with the transformation of the water into wine as the Lord fills everyone with joy and renews his life.

Second: The Book of Genesis begins with the words: ' In the beginning God

³Article 9:1.

¹Against the Pelagians: 3:12.

created...’ to indicate the starting point before the existence of time. A time when the sun, moon, and planets did not exist. A time when there were no ages, seasons, or days (24 hours). Rather, it was periodic batches of time, named as days however long that was. St. John’s Gospel begins with the same expression: ‘ In the beginning’, yet he refers to the Eternal Initiator Who has no beginning. Hence the reference is to eternity where the Logos is at one with the Father.

3- THE TESTIMONY OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

St. John the Baptist has been called a messenger or the angel of God (Mal 3:1). The Bible does not mention that he has performed any miracle, or that he had any visions or divine revelations. Yet he witnessed to the truth, and he led many to repent through the way he adhered to a strict and serious life marked by purity, chastity, and a clear goal- oriented vision. He desired the world to be redeemed and the growth of God’s kingdom on earth; therefore he witnessed to the Redeemer, the true King.

The Light did not need anyone to witness to Him, for He witnesses to Himself by His own light. However, if a person shuts his eyes and insists on corrupting his heart with cravings and rebellion he becomes blind. Hence, he becomes needy for someone to motivate him and witness to the true Light. The Baptist was like a night guard who proclaims that daylight has come; so that those sleeping may arise and open their eyes to perceive the light.

St. John the Baptist came to proclaim that the Messiah has come indeed- the One believers have awaited for so long. He has come as the Redeemer of the whole world, and as the Giver of glory to the new Israel who are His people.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the true Light, whereas John the Baptist was the lantern carrying the light of the Lord within it. He was neither a fake, deceptive light; nor the real bridegroom. Moreover, he did not overpower the bride but, being the bridegroom’s friend, he was joyful at his wedding and union with his bride.

The Baptist got to know the Lord more deeply upon His baptism and the appearance of the Holy Trinity. Hence he proclaimed that the Lord Jesus Christ is the slain Lamb of God (Jn1: 29; Ex 12; Is 53:7; 1Peter 1:19).

Now this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “ Who are you?” [19].

This is the third time in this chapter that the Evangelist presents the Baptist as a witness (1:19, 15, 34- 37). The Evangelist does not focus on the personality of the Baptist but rather on his testimony. Therefore the apostolic tradition documents the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work from the moment He is baptized by St. John the Baptist to the day of His ascension (Acts 1:21-22; 10:37-38; 13:23-24). **‘...the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem...’[19]**...Note that the term ‘Jews’ is mostly used in this Gospel to refer to the Council of the Sanhedrin that represents the top authority of the religious leadership. This Council had formed a committee to investigate the reality of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and to evaluate His actions and popularity. They believed that in doing so they fulfilled a central and intrinsic commandment in the law. Actually, they were not being honest or loyal in their actions; and the following saying can be correctly applied to them: ‘But a prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die’ (Deut 18:20).

The priests and Levites mentioned in the above verses were probably members in the Council of the Sanhedrin. They enjoyed a high degree of learning and erudition, and possessed authority and power. Since St. John the Baptist Himself was a descendant

of Aaron, and since his father was a priest, therefore it was appropriate to send to him priests and Levites who would investigate his case and (the latter were also descendents of Levi, but not particularly of the tribe of Aaron).

They sent representatives to the Baptist not with the intention of verifying his message and co-operating with him; for they considered themselves to be the great leaders of their people. They were motivated to get acquainted with him out of curiosity; or out of a sense of responsibility- as people in authority- to reveal to the people the true character of a certain person if that was beneficial to them. It could be that they acted in this manner hoping to find fault with him: then they could muffle that voice that originated from a source other than the Sanhedrin that possessed the upper hand in religious matters.

St. John the Baptist was asked by the Jewish religious authority: 'Who are you?' (19,22). He clearly indicated that he was neither the Messiah nor Elijah (2 Kings2: 11), nor the redeeming prophet (Ex 15:18). He proclaimed that he was merely a 'voice' (Is 40:3) predicting the coming of the Messiah [23]. The authorities then asked: "Why then do you baptize..." since you have no official rank in the religious order? He replied that the baptism he performed was not an end in itself; but it was to prepare for a greater spiritual act. It would be performed by Someone coming after him but Who existed before him; and Whose 'sandal straps he was not worthy to loose.'

❖ They sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, and these were more dignified than others...

If you are wondering: 'Why did the Jews ask the Baptist this question: 'Who are you?', My answer is that they could not explain why the Baptist submitted to the Lord, whereas many things indicated to them that the Baptist was great and outstanding: First, they were impressed by his origin and his apparent honor and dignity since he was the son of their high priest. Second, by his food and his strict way of life especially his rejection of all mundane possessions. He was awesome in his clothes, in his food, and the living conditions which he had chosen throughout the past years and which he had spent in the desert. In contrast, what they could see in the Lord was the opposite of all that: they considered the Lord's origin contemptible and they lost no chance to show it in their words as they attacked Him on many occasions and said: "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?" (Matt 13:55). The statement also implied the place where it was thought He had been born, and which was according to what Nathaniel had said: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth? (Jn 1; 46). Moreover, the Lord was not dressed in camel's hair and had no leather belt around His waist; neither did He eat honey and locusts. Indeed, the Lord led a life that was similar to that of those present; and He had shared meals with evil men and tax gatherers in order to draw them to Him. The Jews could not understand the Lord's behavior and they consequently mocked Him on that account, but the Lord states: "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children" (Matt 11: 19).

St. John Chrysostom

❖ While the shepherds guarded their sheep, they found the '**Lamb of God**' whose pure bright fleece was wet with dew from heaven while all the ground around it was dry (Judges 6:37). He is the same whose blood would be sprinkled on the doorposts

and would prevent the destroyer of Egypt from striking (Ex 12: 21-23), and would pluck out the sins of the world¹.

St. Jerome

He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed: “I am not the Christ” [20].

From a negative perspective, St. John the Baptist confirmed that he was not that great for he was not the expected Messiah. He would not dismantle the Lord of His status or honor. The Baptist was so awesome that some believed him to be the Messiah. ‘ Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not...’ (Lk3: 15), therefore the Baptist was quick to indicate the falseness of the rumors by announcing that he was not the Messiah.

❖ St. John the Baptist was so transcendent that people thought he was the Messiah; and in that respect he gave proof of humility as he denied that he was not that One².

❖ Although they were **expecting His coming**, yet when He came they opposed Him and tripped as they would over a slightly elevated stone. Truly, He was still a small stone that had been truly cut without hands from the mountain. This resonates with the vision of Daniel, the prophet, who saw a stone cut out without hands (Daniel 2:34-35)...the blinded Jew did not see the lower stone, and their blindness was so great they could not see the mountain³.

St. Augustine

And they asked him, “What then?

Are you Elijah?”

He said: “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?”

And he answered: “No” [21].

He confessed that he was not Elijah the prophet even though he possessed his fiery spirit that would prepare the way of the Messiah (Lk 1:17). That explains why the Lord Jesus Christ said that Elijah had come and they had not recognized him (Matt 17:12). Hence he was not Elijah according to the Jews who expected him to descend in the fiery chariot in which he had ascended to heaven; and who would bring to them certain material and earthly privileges. Moreover, he was neither the prophet that Moses had foretold

(Deut 18: 15, 18) nor as any of the prophets of the Old Testament who had been preoccupied with the concerns of Israel and the adjustment of their political status.

❖ Had he claimed “ I am Elijah” that would have implied that the Lord will actually come in the second time for judgment, and not for the first time to be judged...he had come as a symbol (Lk 1:17). Elijah would come later on and in the appropriate guise for him; as for now; John had come in his likeness⁴.

❖ They did not ask John: ‘ Are you a prophet?’ In other words, if he was one of the prophets; but they asked “ Are you the Prophet?” By using a definite article, they meant the prophet that Moses had foretold and proclaimed (Deut 18:15). And John denied that implication yet he did not deny that he is a prophet. Rather, he denied that he is that Prophet.

St. John Chrysostom

¹ Letter 108: 10

² St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4:13.

³ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4:4.

⁴ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4:6

“Then they said to him: “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us?

What do you say about yourself?” [22].

They asked him for an answer not in order to believe in him or to get baptized, but rather to provide an answer to those who sent them. They expected him to give them a clear answer based on his serious character and lucidity. And they got it.

❖ Note how they pressured him to give an answer. They pursued him by their repeated questions; while he tactfully removed all their erroneous concepts regarding his identity in order to present them with the truth¹.

St. John Chrysostom

He said: “ I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Make straight the way of the Lord” [23].

He was clear in his answer and he pronounced the truth. He explained that he had come to fulfill what is written in the Holy Book, and that he possesses the authority of the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ, preparing the way for Him.

St. John the Baptist spoke about himself as the voice crying out in the wilderness (Is 40: 3-4); and when he saw the Lord, he **cried out** [15]. What was his intention in crying out? It does not refer to a loud external sound or screaming. But it refers to the manner of speaking spiritually to God so that He would hear even when the tongue is silent; and by which the word would pierce the hearts of men. The Lord Himself confirmed that the testimony of the Baptist is true as He says: “ There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which he witnesses of Me is true. You have sent to John, and he has bore witness to the truth” (Jn 5; 32-33).

❖ Although the rational voice of those who pray does not need to be too loud, yet it should not be weak. It is not appropriate for them to scream or shout, for God does hear all prayer. He tells Moses: “Why do you cry to Me?” (Ex 14:14) although Moses had not cried out loudly (since this is not mentioned in Exodus). However, in prayer, he cried out loud in that voice that God alone does hear.

That is also why David says: ‘ I cried out to God with my voice- and He gave ear to me” (Ps 77:1)².

Origen

Origen finds that the desert mentioned here refers to the souls who reject God and virtue. St. John the Baptist knew how to speak to their hearts as though by a spiritual outcry.

❖ This verse occurs in Proverbs 4: 27: ‘Do not turn to the right or the left’ since in doing so, a person loses uprightness. Hence he becomes unworthy of God’s protection as he has deviated from the straight way. God is just and He loves justice. He beholds the upright (Ps 11:7) and He enlightens those he beholds³.

Origen

❖ When St. John the Baptist needed to describe the might and sublimity of the Lord Jesus Christ, he turned immediately to Isaiah the prophet. In doing so, he validated his own words and gave them credibility.

St. John Chrysostom

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 16.2*

² *Commentary on John, Book 6:101*

³ *Commentary on John, Book 6:103*

❖ Just as the sound is a different element from words we speak, so a sound may be issued and have no meaning if it comes without words. Besides, it is possible for the mind to receive words without there being a sound. This happens when we have inner contemplations. From a certain perspective, John the Baptist's voice carries the same relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Word- He is distinct from the Savior Who is the Word¹.

Origen

❖ The announcer called the people to stand behind the judge, and John called the Judge to come. Yes, he truly called on mankind to come and meet that humble One so that they might be spared facing Him as the glorified Judge².

St. Augustine

❖ The bride compliments the bridegroom: 'His mouth is most sweet/ Yes, he is altogether lovely' (Sg of Sol5: 16). In other words: the mouth is located below the chin, and out of it the sound comes through the air tract where the vocal cords are moved by the air. As the words of the groom are as sweet as honey, so his voice is the member of the word. And the sound that comes from his mouth may be called the shepherd or interpreter of the Word that Jesus Christ speaks. This will enable us to understand the implication of the bridegroom's mouth. When they asked John the Baptist: 'Who are you?' He answered: ' I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness' (Jn 1:23). St. Paul presents evidence that the Lord Jesus Christ speaks within him and through Him his voice has become sweet (2 Cor 13:10). **All the prophets have presented themselves as members of the voice of the Holy Spirit, and their voices have become sweet as the holy sweetness rested on their vocal cords. Kings and common men eat honey for its many health benefits.** Yet having enjoyed it has not diminished a desire for more. That is why the bride says of her groom: 'He is all desirable always.' This expresses her reason for seeking him. How greatly blessed are the feet of the groom which make him so desirable. His feet are perfect in every good sense while all his other members are just as perfect and desirable. He is desired not only for his eyes, hands, and locks; but also for his feet, legs and voice. Each of the members have a specific importance and this is not diminished when one member has increased importance over the others³.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

'Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees [24].

And they asked him, saying:

" Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" [25].

Baptism was popular among the Jews for they baptized all who became believers in their faith so that they could enjoy all the Jewish privileges. Hence the cunning implication of the question by which they sought to trap him. If he were baptizing the Jews coming to him for repentance, then he would be dealing with them as though they came from pagan nations. Hence baptizing them would be a denial of their being one of God's chosen people. It would moreover be an insult to the honor of the whole of the Jewish nation who would seem to be unable to achieve the sanctity of the

¹ *Commentary on St. John, Book 2:193.*

² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4;7.*

³ *Song of Solomon: Fr Gregory of Nyssa., Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 14.*

people. On the other hand, they feared that his baptism was a Messianic one and related to the expected Messiah. Then, it is being done by someone who is not a member of the priesthood or the Pharisees. As such he has withdrawn authority and separated himself from them.

❖ Do you not agree that this is what they were aiming at (so that he would stop baptizing or that he would claim to be the Messiah)? The reason they did not state their aim from the beginning is that they feared their intentions would be revealed before everyone¹.

John answered them, saying:

“I baptize with water,

But there stands One among you whom you do not know” [26].

Armed with divine wisdom and a testimony of truth, St. John the Baptist asked them: “ Why are you concerned about the baptism I carry out? It almost has no value if compared with the baptism about to take place. My baptism is a preparation for something greater: the baptism of the expected Messiah. The time has come and He is here among you, yet you do not know Him and that is how you sin. I wish you stopped being concerned with me and my baptism, and be concerned rather with the One I witness to and His baptism!” Just as Elijah was armed with a fiery spirit- he did not fear Ahab the king and the wicked Isabel: but he filled them with terror- so the new John boldly and fearlessly makes his statements before the committee that the Sanhedrin sent to him. He did not speak haughtily but with humility and truthfully at the same time.

Up to this very moment, the Lord Jesus Christ is closer to man more than we can imagine, yet we are unable to comprehend that. According to St. Augustine, the Lord lived within him in his innermost depths and above him in the highest of heights; yet he stupidly went out to search for Him while He was within him.

❖ St. John the Baptist said about the Lord Jesus Christ: “ **...there stands One among you whom you do not know**” for it was appropriate that the Lord mix with the people as one of them. In this way He acquaints us, on every occasion, with his humble nature that is unblemished with pride.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ May you be worthy of having the Lord Jesus Christ within your midst.

For wherever there is peace the Lord is found; for He is peace.

Wherever there is righteousness the Lord is found for He is righteousness.

May He be in your midst so you can see Him and so that you might not be told that there “ **stands One among you whom you do not know**” [26]. The Jews who could not see Him were those who did not believe in Him. We look up to Him in love and seek Him with faith.

May He therefore stand among you so that the heavens that reveal the glory of God open up to you (Ps 19:1). Then you will learn His will and do His works. He who sees the Lord Jesus Christ finds the heavens opened up as they were opened for St. Stephen (Acts 7:56)².

St. Ambrose

“It is He, coming after me, is preferred before me,

Whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose [27].

It is as though St. John the Baptist is stating that the Lord Jesus Christ has a more honorable authority and a more glorious status.

❖ Although John was not performing a spiritual baptism yet he was spiritually

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 16:2*

² *Letters 63:4-5.*

inspired to preach and proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ... since they were not baptized in the name of the Lord neither through their belief in the Holy Spirit they could not receive the mystery of baptism³.

St. Ambrose

❖ It is as though St. John the Baptist is saying: ‘ Do not begin to think that you will find everything in my baptism. If it were complete, another One would not have come after me to offer a different baptism. I offer a baptism that is just a shadow or image; but One will come and add reality to it. Even the fact that He comes after me merely underlines His honor. If the first baptism were sufficient, there would have been no place for another one. He who comes after me possesses more honor and glory.’ To indicate how impossible it is to make a comparison, he says: “ ...whose sandal straps I am not worthy to loose”¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ To carry the shoes of the Lord Jesus Christ is a great matter, yet what is more important is to bow down to all the physical matters related to Him here below (on earth). As we do so, we are enabled to contemplate on His image and resolve all the difficulties related to the mystery of the incarnation... these difficulties are like the strings of His shoes. For one thing, He is the mysterious link and the One Key to knowledge (Lk 11: 52). **Even the greatest among those born of a woman (Lk 7: 28) could not consider himself worthy to solve or reveal these difficulties; since only the One Who has tied and closed can grant, to whom He wishes, the power to solve and open up His shoe lace and all hidden matters**².

❖ The statement about the pair of shoes has a hidden meaning and we should not pass over it. I believe that the Incarnation is one of the shoes as the Son took on flesh and bones; then the trip that the Lord took, in the spirit, to Hades and the prison is the other shoe. Referring to the descent to Hell, Psalm 16:10 says: ‘ For You will not leave my soul in Sheol...’ (Ps 15:10)³.

Origen

❖ There is no bridegroom other than the Lord Jesus Christ and according to St. John: “He who has the bride is the bridegroom” (Jn 3:29). That is the reason why Moses, Joshua, and others removed their shoes. As for His shoes, no one can loosen their straps for according to St. John: **“I am not worthy to loose (His) sandal strap” [27]**⁴.

St. Ambrose

Pope Gregory (the Great) borrows from Origen his concept of the shoes. He indicates that it points to the body that is subject to death since the shoe is made of animal skin after the animal has been killed. It is as though the Word, by His incarnation has put on the flesh- subject to death- and so has hidden His divinity. It was impossible for the Baptist to loosen His straps: in other words, until this time it was impossible for him to be acquainted with His mysteries through the spirit of prophecy⁵.

How humble he became! On that account he became so uplifted! For “... he who

³ *Of the Holy Spirit, Book 1:3:41.*

¹ *Hom. 16. PG 59:94.*

² *Commentary on John, Book 6:172 -173.*

³ *Commentary on John, Book 6:174 -175.*

⁴ *Of the Christian Faith:3:10:71.*

⁵ *Hom. 4:7, Forty Gospel Homilies PL 76: 1099- 1103*

humbles himself will be exalted,”(Lk 14:11)... ‘He said: Not me, but Him’; whereas they said: ‘ We.’ The Baptist is not worthy to loose His sandal straps. How humble would he have been had he claimed his worthiness. However, he revealed his great humility through his words: “ **...He, who coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.**” When he said that he is not worthy to do this, the Holy Spirit filled him and so he knew just as a servant knows his Master. Thus he became qualified to be a friend rather than a servant⁶.

St. Augustine

‘These things were done in Bethabbara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing’ [28].

‘Bethabara’ or the house of crossing, for he had crossed the Jordan. Some believe that this is the same point where Israel crossed the Jordan on their way to the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua.

❖The Evangelist mentions the place to clarify the power of the Baptist’s proclamation as he announced his amazing confession. He did not witness to the Lord inside a house, or on a corner, but he directed to the Jordan and notified of Him among all those who were present that he had baptized and he announced this extraordinary confession.

❖More correct manuscripts mention **‘Bethabara’** rather than ‘Bethany’ since Bethany does not lie beyond the Jordan. Moreover, it does not lie in the desert but close to Jerusalem¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖The meaning of **‘ Bethabara’** could be interpreted as the ‘ House of Preparation’ and this is appropriate for a baptism that is intended to prepare a people for God. ‘ Bethany’ means the ‘ House of Obedience.’ Which one is more appropriate for the one who has been sent as an angel before the coming of the Lord to prepare the way for Him, and to baptize than to consider him to be the ‘ House of Preparation’².

Origen

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, And said: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” [29].

In this testimony by St. John the Baptist we note the following:

❖The Lord Jesus Christ is **the Lamb of God**. Mankind was in the habit of offering sacrifices to God to appease Him. In this instance, however, God the Father Himself is offering His only Son to be the sacrifice.

❖He is an offering for redemption or a guilt offering that has power indeed to remove sins: He is not a shadow or a symbol like animal offerings.

❖The effect of the offering extends to cover all mankind. This is what is foreign to Jewish thought and the following words by **Yalcut Rubeni** is an example: ‘The Messiah will carry the sins of the Israelites.’ That redemption extends to the whole world is a concept that is rejected by the Jews.

This is the second time that the Lord Jesus Christ meets with his forerunner John the

⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4:9*

¹ *Hom.17, PG 59:96*

² *Commentary on John, Book 6:206.*

Baptist. The first meeting is recorded by St. Luke the Evangelist (Lk 1:39- 41) when Jesus was still in St. Mary's womb and John was in St. Elizabeth's womb. Origen draws a kind of comparison between the two meetings:

First: In the first meeting, the babe Jesus, while still in His mother's womb, spilled a kind of His glory on the babe John who also was still in Elizabeth's womb. Moreover, this made such an impression on John's features that many could not distinguish between the origin and the image. Hence some thought that the Baptist is the Messiah (Jn 1:20), while others thought that the Lord Jesus Christ was John risen from the dead (Lk 9:7:15; Matt 14:2; Mk 6:14).

Second: Since the Lord Jesus Christ is the Word and the Baptist is the voice, then that voice was loud within Elizabeth's womb. Hence she was filled with the Holy Spirit upon hearing St. Mary's salutation. That led her to cry out and proclaim her testimony (Lk 1:42). **Origen** says that [this is why the babe John leaped and his mother became like the mouthpiece and a prophetess for the Son (the Word) declaring out loud and saying: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Lk 1:42)]¹.

Origen wonders why the Savior is called a Lamb although the sacrifices in the Old Testament could be of any three types of animals and two types of fowls: a bull, a sheep, a goat, two turtledoves, two pigeons (Lev 5:6-7, 18). He answers by saying that two young sheep were always offered daily: one for the morning offering, and the other for the evening. [What kind of daily offering can be spiritual and offered to a spiritual Being could be better than the Word that is in the beginning: the Word that is symbolically called '**the Lamb**'...He has been sent to enlighten the soul (for this is the morning offering). It is also offered at the end (in the evening) when the mind is preoccupied with heavenly matters?²]. That is how we are to start from the very beginning of our lives: by the offering of the Lamb so that we might spend our entire days meditating on His redemption. Consequently, when we near the end of our lives, we will enjoy the same offering, which will carry us into the new day, the uninterrupted eternity. Then we will see Him with St. John the beloved: "...a Lamb as though it had been slain" (Rev 5: 6).

❖ What we need to understand is the greatness of the Lamb of God Who was slain to remove the sins of the whole world and not of just a few [29]. He suffered for the whole world: 'And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (1 Jn 2:1-2). For He is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe (1 Thess.4: 10). By His Blood He has wiped the judgment pronounced on us, and He has lifted it from our midst so that there is no trace of sins: they have been erased. They have been nailed to the Cross by Him Who 'has disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it' (Col 2:14-15). This is how we learn to be joyful when we undergo suffering in this world. We learn that the reason for our joy is that the world has been overcome (Jn 16:33). Certainly, the world has submitted to her conqueror. Hence all nations are freed from those who rule over them and have turned to serve Him; for He saves the poor from the oppressor through the power of His Blood and rescues the needy who have no helper (Ps 72:4-5)³.

❖ The Lamb of God became a young and innocent lamb taken to be slaughtered in order to **take away the sins of the world** (Is 53:7; Jn 1:29). The One Who grants

¹ *Commentary on John, Book 6:255.*

² *Commentary on John, Book 6:270.*

³ *Commentary on John, Book 6:285-286.*

speech (The Word) to everyone became like a silent lamb standing before its shearers (Is 53:7) so that we might all be purified through His death: this is distributed to those who desire to receive the Truth as a medicine that dispels the influence of the devil and sin. For the death of the Lord Jesus Christ has erased the powers that oppose mankind, and has vanquished with such indescribable authority all sinful living from the existence of every believer⁴.

Origen

❖ Although St. John the Baptist baptized the Lord like many others who came to him, yet no one should think that He came to the Baptist for the same purpose, that is to confess sins and wash in the river to repent. To present the correct proclamation once more, God granted the Baptist the time to state: **“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!”** All doubt would therefore be removed.

It is quite clear that He who is so pure that He has power to remove the sins of others would not come with the intention of confessing sins. Rather, He came to give the opportunity to this marvelous announcer to confirm what he had proclaimed earlier, but in a more specific manner to those who have already heard Him as well as to the many others who would hear him.

St. John the Baptist used the expression **“Behold”** because many had been looking for Him for a long time and, for the reason he states: and that is to carry their sins. Therefore, when the Lord came toward him, the Baptist pointed out to Him and said: **“Behold’** here is the One you have been awaiting for so long, and He is **‘the Lamb.’”**

The Baptist called Him the Lamb in order to remind the Jews of Isaiah’s prophecy that says:

‘He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth’ (Is 53:7)

He reminded them of the shadow under the Law of Moses in order to lead them to that which is better, and from the symbol to the reality. The sacrifice offered by Moses did not remove the sins at once; whereas this One removes the sins of the whole world. The world was in danger of being destroyed so He descended quickly and saved it from the anger of God¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Be proud of the Lord’s Cross rather than be ashamed of It. While the Cross ‘to the Jews is a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness’, it is salvation to us (1 Cor 1:23) ‘...the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God’ (1Cor 1:18, 23). As we have stated earlier, the One who died for us was not absolutely a man: He is the Son of God and God incarnate.

Moreover, if the lamb in the days of Moses was able to make the destroyer pass over, will not He who is the **Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world** be able to remove our sins?!

The blood of dumb sheep granted salvation, so how much more powerful is the Blood of God’s only Son to save us?!

If anyone denies the power of the One crucified, let him ask the devils!

⁴ *Commentary on John, Book 1: 233*

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.17:1.*

If anyone is unable to believe words, let him believe what is tangible. Many have been crucified in this world yet the devils were not fearful. But when they just see the sign of the Cross of the Lord who was crucified for us they tremble. The other men were crucified for their sins, but the Lord was crucified for the sins of others...

‘Because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth’ (Isaiah 53:9; 1 Pet 2:22). Had the Baptist been the only one to make this statement we would have thought that he was taking his Master’s side; but Isaiah has made the same declaration. Although he was not present in the flesh yet he prophesied through the Spirit of the Lord’s coming in the flesh.

Why are we quoting only the prophet here? We also have Pilate himself who judged the Lord and said: “...I have found no fault in this Man...”(Lk 23:14). When he delivered Him, he washed his hands and said: “ I am innocent of the blood of this Person...” (Matt 27:24).

There is also another testimony to the pure Lord Jesus Christ who is without sin, and this is the one given by the thief who was the first to enter Paradise. He rebuked the other criminal and said: “ ...we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this Man has done nothing wrong” (Lk 23:41), and we are all under His authority².

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ ‘The flowers appear on the earth

The time of singing has come

And the voice of the turtledove

Is heard in our land.’ (Song of Sol 2:12).

The bridegroom says: behold the fields are budding with the flowers of virtue. Do you see purity in the beauty and smell of the iris? Do you see the flowers of humility and purple that represent the good smell of the Lord Jesus Christ? Then why do you not make a crown of these flowers? For now is the season for that. Use a branch to make a crown and adorn yourself. Now is the season for pruning. It is the voice of the turtledove that resembles ‘ **the voice crying in the wilderness**’ (Matt 3:3). **St. John the Baptist is the turtledove**. He is the one offering us the bright spring that has brought to mankind the marvelous flowers ready to be gathered. He offers them to all who wish to reap them. It is he who has revealed to us the flower coming from the line of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1): “ **The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world**” (Jn 1:29). The Baptist is the one who clarifies to us the need to repent for our sins, and to live a life of virtue. The text says: “ ...the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land’; and is heard calling: ‘. O land.” The call is for those who have been judged for their sins: the ones that the Bible calls ‘ tax collectors and adulterers.’ These have heard the voice of the Baptist while the rest did not accept his teachings¹.

❖ “**I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh**

And to the hill of frankincense”(Song of Sol 4:6)...²

Human nature has been saved from the brand of sin since **the Lamb of God has taken away the sins of the world and has destroyed evil (Jn 1:29)**. Therefore the Song says: ‘ You are all fair, my love/ And there is no spot in you.’ Besides, the mystery of this emotion is indicated by the significance of myrrh (Song of Sol 4:6). Then there is the mention of the mixture of fragrant herbs and incense that indicate the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. A person who has fellowship with the Lord and partakes of the myrrh, will receive the sweet smelling fragrance of the herbs and

² Article 13:3.

¹ The Song of Solomon: Fr Gregory of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic: Dr George Nawar: Sermon 5.

² The Song of Solomon: Fr Gregory of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic: Dr George Nawar: Sermon 7.

frankincense. For the person who suffers with Him will receive glory with Him (Rom 8:17). Being granted divine glory, he will attain perfect beauty. He will be far removed from all ugly faults and will be separated from sin through and by the Lord Jesus Christ. He has died and has risen from the dead for our sakes and He has glory and power now and forever, Amen.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

❖ **‘Behold! The Lamb of God’:** He is not a branch extending from Adam; and though He has put on Adam’s flesh, He did not take on his sins. Thus, He is the One who washes our sins away as He has not taken the sin inherent in the dough out of which we are made³.

St. Augustine

❖ Ripping (the sin) away is enacted in everyone in the world **so that sin is removed from the whole world**, and so that the Savior may offer a kingdom fit for the Father (1 Cor 15:24). A place where there is no sin and where all submit to the Father’s reign in total submission. Hence the following saying about His Kingdom is fulfilled: ‘...that God may be all in all’ (1Cor 15:28)⁴.

❖ We believe that the Lamb is slain in the evening (Ex 12:6), just as the real Lamb, our Savior, came into the world (Jn 1:29) at the last hour (1 Jn 2:18)⁵.

❖ Each Gospel and message brings joy due to a righteous cause¹.

❖ The Lord Jesus Christ is the righteousness that the nation had been expecting².

Origen

❖ Let us meditate on the benefits of the upright faith. It is useful for me to know that for my sake the Lord bore my weakness and submitted to my carnal emotions. I should say that it was for the sake of each one He became a sin and a curse (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). For my sake He came in humbleness and submission, and for my sake He is the Lamb, the Vine, and the Rock (Jn 1:36, 15:1; 1Cor 10:4). Besides, He is the Slave and Servant (Mk 10:45; Jn 1:38, 13:4-5; Ps 86; 16, 116:14). He did not know the Day of Judgment, and for my sake He did not know the day and the hour (Matt 24:26)³.

St. Ambrose

What does the Evangelist mean by his use of ‘ the world’?

Origen, who believes in the salvation of all mankind, considers that the whole world will be redeemed. He bases his conviction upon the words of St. Paul: “...because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (1 Tim 4:10). However, the prevalent idea in the Church at his time was that the indication of the ‘world’ was to point to the world that had already accepted the Savior’s light and had become a consecrated Church through His Blood. **Origen** expresses his concept by saying: **[Some consider that the ‘world’ indicates the Church only since it is the ornament of the world. She has also been described as the light of the world and according to the Holy Book: “You are the light of the**

³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4:10.*

⁴ *Commentary on John, Book 1:235.*

⁵ *Peri Pascha 25 (Translated by Robert J Daly- ACW)*

¹ *Commentary on St. John, Book 1:28.*

² *Commentary on St. John, Book 1:29.*

³ *On the Christian Faith, 2:11:93.*

world” (Matt 5:14). **The Church is the ornament of the world in which the Lord Jesus Christ is the primary Light of the world and her adornment...yet let us correctly say that the Church is the world that has been enlightened through the Savior** ⁴].

In the praise offered by the angels in the Prime/ morning Prayers we sing: “ O lord God, Lamb of God, son of the Father, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.” Some believe that this is the oldest song of praise offered in the East and West. In the West, believers say before communion: “ O Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world have mercy on us.”

“This is He of whom I said:

‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me For He was before me’ [30].

St. John the Baptist repeats the testimony that although he came before the advent of the Incarnate Word yet the main reason for that was to prepare the way. However, from the perspective of existence, the Word preceded him and existed before all time and hence greater honor is due to Him.

❖ St. John the Baptist states ‘the basic purpose of my coming is to proclaim the General Benefactor of the whole world and to baptize with water. His coming, in contrast, is planned to purify all mankind and to grant the power of the Holy Spirit. The One who comes after me will appear more gloriously for ‘ **He was before me**’⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

‘I did not know Him

But that He should be revealed to Israel Therefore I came baptizing with water’ [31].

The ultimate aim of St. John’s Gospel is to present the Lord Jesus Christ to the people of Israel. St. John the Baptist had not yet seen or known Him until then. Therefore he could describe Him only as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

❖ Both were related according to the flesh...and in order to dispel the idea that the Baptist honors the Lord because of their kinship he states “ **I did not know Him...**”¹.

❖ O John, how could you qualify to be a witness worthy to be trusted and believed? How do you preach a person that you do not know yourself? However, note that John did not say ‘ I was not acquainted with Him’...he said ‘ **I did not know Him.**’ By saying these words he became more trustworthy. And when we ask the Baptist: ‘ **Then how did you know Him?’** His response will be: I knew Him when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him...

Could The Baptist have proclaimed the Messiah and led the people easily to Him without the need to baptize? My answer to this is that this could never have happened. Had he cried out and proclaimed His coming without baptism, people would not have come out of the towns in the way these multitudes came. Moreover, they would not have realized by the comparison made between both how the stature of One of them was so sublime. The crowds had come to be baptized and to repent for their sins and not on account of what they had heard about him or about his words. But when they came, he taught them and witnessed to the Lord and explained the difference between his baptism and that which the Lord performed.

⁴ *Commentary on St. John, Book 6:301, 304*

⁵ *Hom.17.*

¹ *Hom.17. PG59:99.*

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Although the Baptist had recognized the Lord while He was still in His mother's womb (Lk 1:41-42), he certainly did not know everything about Him. Probably, he did not know that this is 'He who baptizes by fire and the Holy Spirit' until he saw the Spirit descending and remaining on Him [33]².

Origen

❖ **And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him" [32].**

❖ Do not imagine that this is an incarnation, but it is an appearance. The appearance came before him so that through it would believe the one who hasn't seen the Spirit. This appearance was accompanied by the proclamation that the Holy Spirit is at one with the Father and the Son: They share the honor of authority, unite and act mysteriously, and constitute one gift that is granted in baptism³.

❖ The Baptist appropriately says: "...**He remained on Him**", because the Spirit inspires the words or actions of the prophets at His will, whereas He is constantly residing in the Lord Jesus Christ⁴.

❖ Do not doubt due to the words: '**on Him**' as they are used to indicate 'the Son of Man' and this was the nature of the Lord at the time of His baptism. According to His divinity, the Spirit does not rest '**on**' Him but rather '**in Him**' just as the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father¹.

St. Ambrose

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic says that when the Holy Spirit rested on the Lord Jesus Christ [**the purpose is to sanctify us so that we may have fellowship with the Spirit as well** ²].

❖ Unless they received the Spirit of the One who, by nature, is the true Son of God, they could not have become His children since by nature, they had been created. To achieve that, 'the Word became flesh' so that man could receive the Divine³.

❖ The Father carries out all His work through the Word and the Holy Spirit. In this way the unity of the Holy Trinity is preserved⁴.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

❖ I am not speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ in whom the Spirit resides and as though He was granted energy or *energoun ouchos*. Rather, I am speaking about Him as a companion to the One who possesses the same honor⁵.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

St. John Chrysostom does not hesitate to proclaim that the Lord Jesus Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit. Since He is a Spirit then His very soul is in the same image

² *Commentary on John, Book 1:239*

³ *On the Holy Spirit, Book 3:1:4.*

⁴ *On the Holy Spirit, Book 3:1:5.*

¹ *On the Holy Spirit, Book 3:1:6.*

² *Oratio Contra Arianos 1:47 PG 26:108c.*

³ *Oratio Contra Arianos 2:59 PG 26:273 A.*

⁴ *Epistola ad Serapionem 1:28-29 PG 26:596 A.*

⁵ *Oratio 41, In Pentacosten, 11 PG 36: 444 B.*

(considering His incarnation): He is the Word of God as well as the soul's energy.⁶ **St. Gregory of Nyssa** opposes the statement that the Spirit worked within the Lord Jesus Christ and says: 'I wish to add to the indication that the Spirit abides in the Lord, that He dwells as a companion equal to Him in honor rather than as someone ' giving Him power'⁶. It gave **St. Gregory of Nyssa** pleasure to speak about the Holy Spirit as a companion of the Incarnate Word and an informant Who revealed His works⁷.

St. Cyril the Great devotes the Anathema 9 to the teachings concerning the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Lord Jesus Christ. God the Word does not need to be filled through the Spirit for He is Holy by nature. In contrast, the body of the Incarnate Word received the Spirit as it contains the Divinity.

❖ He is the second Adam who looks like one of us; and He received the Spirit from the Father in order to preserve our nature... the Spirit had departed from us due to sin. Now the One Who knew no sin became like one of us so that the Spirit might remain constantly with us⁸.

❖ Due to sin, the Holy Spirit could not be pleased to rest in human beings. But when the Word of God became incarnated He became the new first-born for mankind. In Him alone could the Spirit rest and so rested upon us all⁹.

❖ Having become man, He could receive the Holy Spirit. Yet being incarnate and having no sin, the Spirit desired to dwell and remain in Him as He became the first-born of mankind and possessed a different nature¹.

❖ As His entire body is filled with the invigorating living Spirit, He therefore indicated that His body is a spirit. However, He did not deny that it is a flesh².

St. Cyril the Great

❖ The Messiah arrives, and the Spirit prepares the way for Him. He comes in the flesh and the Spirit is never separated from Him. He does amazing acts and grants healing through the Holy Spirit. Devils are cast out by gift of the Spirit and His presence demolishes them. The forgiveness of sins is granted by the Spirit, for according to 1 Cor 6:11: 'you were washed, but you were sanctified...in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God³.

St. Basil the Great

❖ **'His eyes are like doves by the rivers of waters...'** (Song of Sol 5:12). This text expresses the pure spiritual life through the imagery doves. St. John the Baptist saw something similar **when the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and covered the waters** (Jn 1:32). For this reason, a person who is appointed through God is like the eyes of the church's body and it is essential that he wash away any obstacle that impedes his sight. Consequently, he would be enabled to fulfill efficiently the task of supervision and watchfulness. **The Lord tells us that there is many ways to wash our eyes** and not just one; for there are many virtues that represent sources of purification. We should use these to clean and purify our eyes. Examples of these pure

⁶ *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos Homilia 15:2. PG 63:119*

⁶ *Oratio 41. In Pentecosten. PG 36:444 B*

⁷ *Cf. Oratio Catechetica Magna, 2. PG 45:17 B.*

⁸ *In Joannis Evangelium 2:1, 32. PG 73:265D. - 267 A.*

⁹ *In Isaiam 2:11 PG 70:313D.*

¹ *Dialogus 6. PG 75:1008 C.*

² *In Joannis Evangelium 4 PG 73: 604.*

³ *Liber de Spiritu Sancto 19:49 PG 32:157 A*

sources of water are: perseverance, constant labor, humility, truthfulness, righteousness, discipline and courage, the desire to do good, and being far removed from wickedness. These and other kinds of waters flow from one Source that gathers all their riverbeds into one bed. Through that one bed all the sources are purified of all the secreted reactions⁴.

‘ I did not know Him,

But He who sent me to baptize with water said to me:

“ Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him

This is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” ’ [33]

❖The Lord Jesus is the Son of God and (although the Gospel’s core preaches our adoption as God’s children through Jesus Christ) yet the Lord did not preach the Gospel before His baptism.

Since the Lord Himself has waited for the right and appropriate time, do we have the right- as His servants - to contradict this procedure?! (From that time Jesus began to preach) when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the physical form of a dove (Matt 4:17; Lk 3:22). This did not happen so that the Lord Jesus Christ would see and recognize Him, for He knew Him before descending upon Him in that way. Rather, the Spirit descended with a physical aspect in order that John who baptized Him would see and accordingly say: “...but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me: Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (Jn1: 33).

If you too are wearing a strong shield, then the Holy Spirit will descend and rest in you; and the Father will speak to you from the high. He will not say: **’This is My Son’** but rather “ You have now become My Son.” The simple present used in the statement “This is My Son” is applicable only to the Son who from ‘... the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (Jn 1: 1). Hence He is the only One of whom God would say: “He is My Son” since He is God’s Son eternally. As for you, it will be told you that “ Now you have become...” because **you are not a son by natural law but, rather, you receive that designation through God’s adoption.** He is a Son since time everlasting, whereas you have been granted that grace just recently¹.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖What is it that St. John the Baptist did not know? It is the power of the baptism granted by the Lord. It is a power that does not get conveyed from God to any other person, but it is clearly achieved in this way. Power does not pass from God to anyone whether the person serving is good or evil. The dove does not retreat from service if the servant is evil but she looks up to God’s power. Since God is righteous, what harm then what can an evil servant do to you?²

❖St. John the Baptist knew that Jesus Christ is the Lord, and he confessed that He is the Truth. He also knew that he himself is a truthful person sent by the Truth. This is what John knew. So what did he not know about the Lord Jesus Christ? **That the time had come for the Lord to retain for Himself the power of His baptism and not convey it to any other servant...so what did he not know? That the great authority of baptism belongs to God and that He reserves it to Himself whether He is present here on earth or when He is in heaven in His glory and absent in the flesh.** Thus St. Paul and St. Peter cannot say: ‘ ...my baptism.’ Give attention and

⁴ *The Song of Songs by Fr Gregory of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 13*

¹ *Article 3:14.*

² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 5:11.*

listen to the words of the apostles: none of them says: ‘...my baptism’; yet although there is one Message you will find that they refer to ‘...my gospel’ ...so they do not utter the words ‘...my baptism.’ This is what the Baptist got to know, my brethren. Let us learn what he learned from the dove too. For the dove taught the Baptist as well as the Church for she is the one to whom these words refer: ‘My dove, my perfect one, is the only one...(Song of Sol 6:9). May the Dove (the Holy Spirit) teach the dove (the Church)³.

❖ You tell me that this or that person has baptized you, yet it is through the Dove (the Holy Spirit) we are both told: ‘It is the (Lord) who baptizes you. Who do I believe: the Dove or the kite?’⁴

❖ This mystery is most sacred and even if it is performed by a murderous servant it cannot be corrupted or damaged⁵.

❖ What was the benefit when you accept baptism by a certain servant and you be unwilling to accept baptism by the Lord?

Since you have come to a servant, would you be unwilling to come to the Lord? If you have accepted to be baptized by a servant, will you be unwilling to receive baptism from the Lord?⁶

❖ If the Baptist did not know Him at all, he would not have told the Lord - when He came to the River to be baptized: “ I need you to baptize me, so how is it that You come to me?”...He recognized the Lord through the Dove: it did not concern what he did not know but it concerned what his Informer revealed to him by some manner, and concerning the aspect of the Lord that he did not know. This was done for our sake so that we might discover the Baptist’s position, what he did not know, and what he learned from the Dove⁷.

St. Augustine

❖ I believe that we cannot stop seeing that fire when we read that the Lord Jesus Christ baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire [33] according to the words of St. John in his Gospel...That is why Jeremiah, having received the Spirit, says: “...His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back...” (Jer 20:9). What does this mean- I mean that this fire becomes water, and the water requires fire- is this **the gift of the Holy Spirit that burns our sins and washes them with water?** For sin is washed and gets burned¹.

St. Ambrose

❖ He accepted to be baptized by John with this intention: because He accepted what is of lesser value from someone who is of lesser stature, then He encourages us who are lesser to accept what is more sublime².

❖ If the Lord Jesus Christ had been the only one who accepted to be baptized by the Baptist, then people would have believed that the Baptist’s baptism is greater than that of the Lord. They would have said: ‘ This baptism is greater for only the Lord qualified for it.’ However, the Lord came to be baptized to serve as a model of humility and to call us to receive redemption through baptism.

The Lord accepted to go through something which was not necessary for Him;

³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 5: 8-10*

⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 5:13.*

⁵ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 5:19*

⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4:13*

⁷ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 5:2*

¹ *Duties of the Clergy, Book 3:18:102-103.*

² St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 5:5*

yet it was necessary on our account.

Just to underline that what the Lord received through the Baptist is not to be preferred over baptism through the Lord, others were allowed to be baptized by the Baptist. However, their baptism was not sufficient since they had to go through the baptism offered by the Lord Jesus³.

❖ The baptism offered by the Lord Jesus Christ is fitting to His nature: it is the baptism of God, a divine one because the Lord is God⁴.

St. Augustine

‘And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God’ [34].

❖ Note that John had baptized and Jesus had baptized too. The words that were pronounced at the time of Christ’s baptism could have been intended for the Baptist. However, and in order to avoid any confusion in the minds of those who were present, the Spirit descended and rested on the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. John Chrysostom

4- THE TESTIMONY OF HIS FIRST DISCIPLES

- The testimony of the Baptist that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah [35 -37] won Andrew over.

- Consequently, Andrew’s testimony won Simon over and the Lord named him Cephas [42].

- The Lord called Phillip from Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee, and he won over Nathaniel [45-51] an Israelite ‘in who is no guile.’

Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples [35]

And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said:

“Behold the Lamb of God” [36].

‘...looking at Jesus...’ We are in great need to look and see Jesus. We need to look to Him in order to see Him looking at us and concerned with our redemption.

John the Baptist has testified that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God [34]. No one listened to his words nor questioned him as to why or to whom he was saying them.

He says it again here: “This is the Lamb of God!” Yet their mortal senses did not respond, and he found their nature as that of hard ground that would be softened by his care. He would improve their muddled discernment by his words for he toiled with one purpose in mind: to bring them to the Lord. He strove to make them adhere to Him as he knew that if they accepted his words they would no longer need someone to witness to Him.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ When the time came for God to show mercy, the Lamb came.

What kind of Lamb is it that wolves do fear?

Of what kind is that Lamb that when it is slain, a lion is slain too? Since the devil is called a lion ‘that walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour’ (1 Peter 5:8). By the Blood of the Lamb the lion has been defeated...

This is a great matter to behold: throughout the whole world the lion has been vanquished by the blood of the Lamb, and members of the Lord are saved from the lion’s mouth and united with the Lord’s Body¹.

❖ The Lord wishes to own what He has bought alone. He does not wish anyone to

³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 5:5*

⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 5:6*

¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 7:6.*

share His possession with Him for:

He has paid a great price in order to be a sole owner.

You make Him a partner with Satan to whom you have sold yourself.

‘ Woe be to those who try to have it both ways’ (Sirach 2:12). Those who give part of their heart to God and the other to Satan.

This angers God as Satan gets a share of the heart. Hence He quits and Satan takes over the whole heart and possesses it. Therefore it is not in vain that the apostle says: ‘...nor give place to the devil’ (Eph 4:27).

Let us therefore, my brethren, know the Lamb and understand the price paid for us².

St. Augustine

‘The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus’ [37].

When they heard about redemption they adhered to the Savior promptly and without any discussion. Each moment of postponement constitutes an exposure of the soul to danger. Hence it is appropriate for you to go and seek Him without delay.

The two disciples who followed Him were eager to receive and accept the words of grace from His mouth rather than from the mouth of the forerunner. The number 2 stands for love and the two disciples refer to all those who accepted to be completely His followers, and to consecrate their lives to love God and their neighbors. These are the two disciples who urge and motivate us to sincerely follow the Lord Jesus Christ. St. John the Evangelist recounts the invitation to two of the Baptist’s disciples to follow the Lord. These are Andrew and (most probably) John the Evangelist himself. The first went to call his brother Simon Peter. These are the first three who became the Lord’s disciples. In this way, the Church started on a very small scale that included three members who enjoyed looking to the Lord and be part of His kingdom. **Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, “ What do you seek?” They said to Him: Rabbi”(which is to say, when translated, Teacher), “ where are you staying?” [37].**

We always need to give an answer to the Lord’s question “ what do you seek” in every act, word or thought we are engaged in. Do we seek the Lord in every act? Are we preoccupied to be enlightened by His Holy Spirit? Do we yearn to be in the Father’s embrace? Do we seek to develop and strengthen true knowledge, and constantly sanctify ourselves and our inner glory? Do we seek that which glorifies God and the well being of the Church?

This is the constant question that the Lord Jesus Christ puts to every person: What do you seek? Are you seeking worldly possessions, pleasures, men’s praise and fake honor? Or are you seeking to be with the Lord wherever He may be? The Lord had no place where He could rest for He lived as a stranger. It is the same for those who seek him for they will live with Him as strangers on earth. Hence it is insufficient to seek the Lord and follow Him from time to time but **we need to stay and remain with Him**. As we get closer to Him, we will enjoy the brilliance of His glory and the wealth of His love; and we will not desire to be ever separated from Him.

We are in need to meet Him and stay with Him. We need to sit at His feet and be refreshed from the springs of His love. We will be enlightened by His Holy Spirit and get acquainted with His hidden and unspeakable mysteries. **St. John Chrysostom** expresses this thought in these words: ‘ They did not say teach us about opinions and beliefs or other important matters, but they said: Where are you staying?’

² St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 7:7.*

When they asked to stay with Him, His immediate was to invite them to come and see so that they could come promptly and without delay: ‘... **now is the accepted time**’ (2 Cor 6:2).

The Lord knew exactly what was in their hearts when they asked to follow Him, so why did He ask?

First: To grant them confidence so that they would state their desire, to reveal His pleasure at their zeal for redemption and desire to lead a sanctified life, and in order to give them support.

Second: To state that He is ready to begin with us on the journey of our souls towards the Truth and eternal glory. Yet He will not begin without our will for He cherishes the freedom that He has granted to us.

❖ By granting us His gifts, we learn that He does not withhold our freedom. However, if we begin to seek Him, He will grant us real strength of will (inflare our own desire for Him) and will offer us many means for redemption¹.

❖ “What do you seek?”...By this question, the Lord makes them relate to Him more. Besides, He grants them greater boldness, and demonstrates to them that they are worthy to hear Him. They were probably shy and afraid since they were unknown to Him even though they had heard their teacher’s testimony concerning Him. To help them get over that He puts this question to them rather than invite them silently to the house...He asked in order to grant them serenity and confidence and to remove their anxiety and timidity².

St. John Chrysostom

Third: St. John Chrysostom explains: [He gave them great attention and indicated that they were ready and qualified to listen to Him. It is understandable that they felt embarrassed and fearsome, as they did not know Him. He removed all their illusions and fears by asking His question rather than taking them silently to the house].

Origen says that after St. John the Baptist had pronounced his six testimonies to the Lord Jesus Christ, it now was the turn of the Word Himself to witness to Himself before the Baptist’s two disciples¹.

He said to them:

“Come and see.”

They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour) [39].

St. John Chrysostom believes that the Lord Jesus Christ loved the two disciples as they followed Him after hearing their teacher’s testimony. Consequently, He engaged in conversation with them on the way and this made them feel they were no longer strangers to Him. Moreover, He sought to grant them the joy of hearing the divine voice.

Oh how much we need to walk with Him along the path of our lives, and to hear His divine Voice. Let us give Him the chance to talk with us. This is similar to what happened to the two disciples after the Resurrection and who were on their way to Emmaus (Lk 24: 13).

St. John Chrysostom comments as follows on the conversation that took place with two of the Baptist’s disciples: [May we therefore learn to consider that all matters are secondary to hearing God’s word. We need to stop thinking that it is sometimes not convenient to do so...food, washing, and all matters related to this life may have a

¹ Cf. *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 18:3*

² *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 18:23.*

¹ *Commentary on John, Book 2:219.*

specific timetable; but learning the Heavenly teachings do not occur at an appointed time for it is adequate to receive them at all times. St. Paul Says: “ Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). And the prophet says: “...in His law he meditates day and night (Ps 1:3) ²]. The two disciples came to Him at ten o’clock to stay with Him wherever He stays. Those who obey His commandments (the Ten Commandments) proclaim a desire to obey and reside with their Savior each day of their lives. They do not get separated from Him until the day comes for them to meet Him face to face in the life to come. ❖They did not follow Him in a haphazard way, but they adhered to Him³.

St. Augustine

St. Augustine considers that the number 10 indicates the Law as there are Ten Commandments. They went to the Lord Jesus Christ as He is the One who has given the Law and fulfilled it (Matt. 5:17). They wanted to learn the Law from Him who issued it for mercy rests on His lips (Prov. 31:26). St. Augustine goes on to say: [If you are unable to fulfill the Law, then flee to mercy. If you are unable to obey the law then use the promises, the links, and the prayers that the heavenly One has set and organized for He has gone the way of the Law and experienced it]⁴.

Origen finds that the Lord invited the two disciples to experience the pleasure of being and living with Him by leading a life of service and meditation. By calling them to “ Come” He invited them to an active life; and by saying “See” He invited them in order to set up the link between work and meditation on Him at the same time¹.

‘One of the two who heard John speak,

And followed Him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother’ [40].

In the Greek language the word ‘Andrew’ means ‘ manliness.’ This is an apt naming for a person who follows the Lord Jesus Christ. You need to be eager to enjoy Him and live with Him. According to the Psalmist: “Wait on the Lord, be of good courage ...” (Ps 27:14).

The Evangelist does not report the name of the other disciple, since he is the write of the words in this Gospel.

‘He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him:

“We have found the Messiah” (which is translated ‘the Christ’) [41].

By saying ‘ **He Found**’, the Evangelist indicates how Andrew cared for his brother and looked for him so that he would share the new experience he enjoyed after meeting with the Lord. He said humbly: “ **We have found the Messiah.**” He did not take the entire honor to himself for he had someone else with him. Yet he speaks proudly and victoriously of the One they have found: they found a pearl of great value and a true treasure. He did not repeat the words of his teacher, St. John the Baptist, who said ‘ the Lamb of God’; but he used the words recorded in the holy Bible ‘**the Messiah.**’ To meet with Him constituted the desire of every Jew.

St. John Chrysostom considers that the invitation of Andrew to his brother Simon, and the invitation that people extend to each other represents a clear image of friendship in the Lord and of co-operation within God’s kingdom. He says that when God created Adam He did not leave him alone, but gave him a wife to be his companion and helper. Although Eve harmed this fellowship, a wise person can enjoy

² *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 18:4.*

³ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 7:9.*

⁴ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 7:10.*

¹ *Commentary on John, Book 2:219*

many benefits of fellowship. These are not limited to relations with the wife and children, but with our brothers. Therefore the prophet says: “Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps 133:1). St. Paul the apostle also urges us not to abandon our meeting together (Heb 10:25)².

❖ The expression ‘ **we have found Him**’ indicates someone striving in order to be with the Lord. Someone who is seeking His advent from above, rejoices for achieving the search and finding Him, and hurries away to give the joyful news to others. This is the role of brotherly love as through a natural friendship and the Lord’s planning, we are able to extend a hand to others and offer spiritual riches³.

St. John Chrysostom

THE INVITATION OF PHILIP TO NATHANIEL

And he brought him to Jesus.

Now when Jesus looked at him, He said,

“ You are Simon the son of Jonah.

You shall be called Cephas”

(which is translated, A rock) [42].

Philip received his call directly and not through the Baptist as in the case of Andrew and John. Neither was he called through Andrew in the way Simon Peter was called. Clearly, the Lord uses every possible manner to invite and call His children.

The Lord found Philip just like someone who would be looking for him and wanting to find Him. In Andrew’s case, he did not only witness for the Lord Jesus Christ but went and brought his brother to Him. He wanted his brother to come to the Source, to hear His Voice, and see His work.

The Lord called Simon by his name and then changed it to indicate his mission as a witness to the belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

His parents had named him ‘**Simon**’ which means ‘ a hearer’ or ‘ obedient.’ Actually, he met the Lord in a spirit of obedience and so the Lord called him ‘**Cephas**’ or ‘**Peter**’ since he enjoyed the Rock of faith: the Rock designates the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:4) whom Simon Peter loved.

❖ You might wonder: But why did the Lord Jesus Christ do that? My answer is: In order to reveal that He is the One who has given us the old Law, and the One who assigned the names and rectified them. He is the One who called Abram as Abraham, and Sarai as Sarah, and Jacob as Israel. He has designated the names of many others from their birth, such as Isaac and Samson. Moreover, He has set names for those mentioned in the prophecies of Isaiah and Hosea; besides adding names to those who had already been named by their parents.

Everyone of those has received a different name. Yet now we all have received one surname and that is the greatest of all names and that is **Christians and children of our God: His friend and His body**. This surname is better than all others for in Him we have sufficiency as He uplifts and quickens us. Thus we become the fastest in doing virtuous acts.

St. John Chrysostom

‘The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee,

And He found Philip and said to him:

“Follow Me” [43].

The Lord went to Galilee to invite Phillip. The word ‘ Galilee’ means ‘ migrating’ or ‘

² Cf. *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 19:1*

³ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 19:1*

proclaiming' or 'a circle.' The Lord wanted to reveal the obligation for disciples to migrate from the sufferings of the present world in order to enjoy the delight of eternal glory. This occurs when the heart moves away from the confusion of temporal matters of this world and experiences sublime heavenly peace or the heavenly circle. According to **St. Clement of Alexandria**, it was said that this disciple is the same one who asked the Lord permission to go and bury his father when the Lord asked him to follow Him (Matt.: 21-22). In Acts 6:5 his work as a deacon is recorded. Fr Theodorus, Bishop of Koresh believes that he preached in Phrygia (these two areas have the same name); and according to **Eusebius**, Philip is buried in Phrygia Pacatiana.

**'Now Philip was from Bethsaida,
The city of Andrew and Peter' [44].**

'Bethsaida' or 'the house of fishing' was so called because most of its inhabitants were fishermen. It was an area known for its wickedness (Matt 11:21). Yet there were in it a few who remained consecrated to the Lord, and chosen according to His grace. The Evangelist does not mention this city haphazardly but to communicate a symbolic meaning: 'Bethsaida' or the 'house of fishermen' actually indicates that those who accept the Lord's invitation to follow Him become fishers of men (Matt. 4:19). Indeed and Philip's first catch was Nathaniel whom he brought to the Lord.

❖ According to the Gospel (Jn. 1:44) Philip the apostle came from the same city as that of Andrew and Peter. He was blessed because he was the friend of the two brothers as these were the first to be honored by the Gospel.

Andrew perceived the mystery of the Lord Jesus Christ and followed Him after hearing St. John the Baptist saying: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Andrew learned where the Lord lived and carried the joyful news written in the prophecies a long time ago and told his brother Simon Peter. Note that a person has to have faith before he can hear. Now the person whose heart is wholly attached to the Lamb becomes sanctified through a name change: hence instead of calling him Simon, the Lord called him Peter, and his name became Peter.

A name change applies also to Abraham and Sarah who went through many spiritual stages and then received the promise of God's blessings: they became the grandparents of many nations through a name change.

This is similar to what happened to Jacob whose name became Israel after wrestling for long during the night with an angel.

St. Peter the great disciple developed through the same blessing. Having learned of the faith of his brother in the Lamb of God, he continued through faith and became the Stone. Due to his faith, Philip too deserved to become a friend of Andrew and Peter after the Lord found him. The Gospel says the Lord found Philip who became a follower of the Word of God: "Follow Me" (Jn 1: 43).

Having being enlightened by the light of faith, Philip invited Nathaniel to come to the Lord, get acquainted with the mystery of faith, and be filled with His light. Therefore Philip said to him: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (Jn. 1:45). Nathaniel received the good news attentively and the mysterious prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus Christ sounded good to his ears. He knew that Bethlehem would be the first place where God would appear in the flesh, and that after that He would live in Nazareth and therefore He was called **the Nazarene**.

By searching the scriptures, Nathaniel learned that the Lord was to be born in the flesh from the line of David and in Bethlehem. Moreover, His mysterious birth had to

occur in a stable that had swaddling cloths in which the baby would be wrapped and that there would be a man to look after them. According to the Holy Bible, many Gentiles lived in the region of Galilee (Isa. 9:1). Consequently, Nathaniel was enlightened and said: “ Can anything good come out of Nazareth? ” (Jn.1:46). At this point, Nathaniel came out from under the fig tree that had hidden the Light and he adhered to the One who had cursed the unfruitful fig tree and its leaves dried up. The Word of God testified that Nathaniel was a true Israelite in whom was no guile for he proved to be as pure as our father Abraham (Gen 25:27). The Lord Jesus Christ says accordingly: “ Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile” ¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

‘Philip found Nathaniel and said to him:

“We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” ‘ [45].

Nathaniel and Bartholomew are considered the names for one and the same person due to the following:

A- The writers of the gospels who have mentioned Bartholomew did not mention Nathaniel, and the opposite is also true.

B- The word ‘ Bartholomew’ is not the name of a certain person for it means ‘ the son of Ptolemy’, hence his real name is Nathaniel.

C- St. John the Evangelist speaks of Nathaniel as one of the apostles who went with the others to fish when the Lord appeared to them after His resurrection (Jn. 21:2-4). Philip’s words reveal his zeal to search the Holy Bible especially the books of the law and the prophets. This inflamed his heart with eagerness to see ‘ Jesus ’ or ‘the Messiah’ who would come from the line of David...and finally he found the One who reveals Himself to those who seek Him.

Philip says that he is ‘ **Jesus**’ or in other words ‘the redeeming Jehovah’ in order to announce to Nathaniel that He is the Savior that the law and the prophets have spoken about for so long. As to calling Him ‘**the son of Joseph**’ it is not to convey that he had implanted Him, but to confirm that his lineage is the house of David from which Joseph is descended.

‘And Nathaniel said to Him:

Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

And Philip said:

“Come and see” [46].

❖ These words do not come from an unbeliever, nor from someone who deserves to be blamed. He is to be praised...why? And in what manner? Because Nathaniel was interested in the writings of the prophets even more than Philip. He had learned from the Holy Scripture that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem; from the city of David...the character of Nathaniel makes him a person that cannot be deceived easily. Yet he did not dismiss the Person who came to him and he came to the Lord with that great desire that he felt towards Him. Inwardly, he felt that Philip might have been mistaken about the place (and not about the Person)¹.

St. John Chrysostom

Fr. Bede believes that the word ‘**Nazareth**’ is appropriately used to refer to the

¹ Song of Solomon: Fr Gregory of Nyssa. Translated in Arabic by Dr Geogr Nawar: Sermon 15

¹ Hom. 20. PG 59: 116-117.

mysteries of the Lord for it could be translated as ‘about purity’ or ‘his flowering’ or ‘separate.’ For the Lord is the holy Savior of the world who is wholly pure and He is apart or separate from any sin. In the Song of Solomon are these words: ‘ I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys ’ (Sg of Sol. 2:1); and Isaiah the prophet speaks about Him and says: ‘There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots’ (Isa.11: 1).

Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward Him and said of him:

“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” [47].

The Lord praised him for being an honest Israelite that conveys that he is a real descendent of Jacob who struggled for the sake of the Lord and therefore deserved to be named ‘ Israel’ (Genesis 32: 28). By saying: “ **An Israelite indeed...**” the Lord conveyed that he deserved to be a descendent of Jacob as he not only believes in his God, but also worships Him and struggles to be loyal and sincere. By saying: “ **...in whom there is no guile**” the Lord indicates that in spite of the corruption that characterized the nation at that time yet Nathaniel loyally held on to his faith and way of life, walking righteously and in godliness.

❖ It is as though the Lord is telling him: “ Although you are under the shadow of sin, yet I have chosen you.” As Nathaniel realized that he was there under the fig tree and no one else was there, he knew His divinity and answered: “ You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” These words were spoken by the one sitting under the fig tree yet he had not become a dry one for he knew the Lord².

St. Augustine

‘Nathaniel said to Him:

How do you know me?

Jesus answered and said to him:

Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you “ [48].

What does the fig tree stand for?

First: Fr. Bede sees that the fig tree sometimes refers to the sweetness of divine love. However, since our first parents made for themselves clothes from the fig leaves, it has come to indicate the tendency to sin and to cover up rather than seek divine sweetness. Hence ‘ Nathaniel’ refers to ‘God’s gift’; while this gift has become corrupted due to its tendency to sin and to cover it up.

Second: St. John Chrysostom believes the dialogue between Philip and Nathaniel occurred under the fig tree¹.

❖ In this instance the fig tree stands for sin...as you know , the first human being covered himself with fig leaves when he sinned. With these leaves they covered up their nakedness as they blushed on account of their sins (Genesis 3:7). What the Lord had created for them as members of their body, they turned into an object of shame. Had wickedness not been involved, nakedness would not have resulted in shame.

St. Augustine

❖ May Jesus look at me while I am still under the fruitless fig tree, and may my fig tree give forth fruit after three years (Lk 13:6).

St. Ambrose

² *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 39:5.*

¹ *Hom. 20. PG 59: 117 -118.*

**‘Nathaniel answered and said to Him:
“Rabbi, You are the Son of God!
You are the King of Israel!” [49].**

When Nathaniel came in touch with the Lord Jesus Christ, he called Him ‘Rabbi’, ‘Son of God’, and ‘King of Israel.’ The Lord had praised him for being an Israelite in whom there was no guile, and now Nathaniel bows down to accept Him to be King over himself and over all Israel.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, this recognition is incomplete. Nathaniel said: “You are the King of Israel”; and he did not comprehend that He is King and Savior of the whole world. Although he had uttered the same words of Simon Peter: “You are the Son of God” yet the Lord did not bless him as He did Simon Peter. Nathaniel did comprehend neither the divinity of the Lord nor His reality, for he believed He was just a sublime teacher.

**‘Jesus answered and said to him:
“ Because I said to you ‘ I saw you under the fig tree’ do you believe?
You will see greater than these” [50].**

Some believe that Nathaniel was in the habit of sitting under a fig tree, and do what some Jewish teachers did: sit and read the Holy book, meditate calmly, speak with God, pray for the redemption of his soul and of all Israel. The eyes of God are upon His children especially as they sit quietly to enjoy their meditation on God and on His redeeming acts.

**‘And He said to him:
“Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open
And the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” [51].**

Some find that this imagery is taken from the procedures followed when a prince would visit a certain country: ambassadors would travel back and forth carrying messages from and to him. Similarly, the heavenly angels who are messengers will be sent to serve their King who has accepted to become incarnated and to walk on the earth as the Son of Man.

While Nathaniel testifies: **“You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel” [49]**, the Lord humbly calls Himself **“the Son of Man.”**

He may be speaking here about His second coming to judge the world.

❖Do you observe how the Lord lifts Nathaniel gradually upwards and away from the earth; leading him to discover that He is not just a mere person?! For how can He be a person when angels wait on Him and ascend and descend to serve Him. That is why the Lord tells him: “You will see greater things than these” [50]. To confirm that meaning, He presented the service of the angels to Him.

What the Lord intended to convey is this: ‘Do you think that it is a great issue that you, Nathaniel, confess that I am the King of Israel? So what would you say about Me if you saw the angels ascending and descending for Me? By these sayings the Lord confirmed to Nathaniel that He is Lord over the angels for they descend and ascend as the servants of the Son of their true God.

The angels descended and ascended at the time of the Lord’s crucifixion, at His resurrection, His ascension, and earlier when they came and served Him {Matt 4:11).

At His birth, they came to deliver the message:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men (Lk 2:11).
They also appeared to Mary, and they came to Joseph¹.

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21.*

St. John Chrysostom

❖ If they descend and ascend to Him then he is there above and here below at the same time. They would not ascend and descend to Him if He were not in the place to which they ascended or here in the place to which they descended ...
Let us perceive the presence of the Lord above and below through Saul. The voice of the Lord Himself came to him from heaven saying: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4) What?...
From where is he speaking? From heaven, therefore He is there.
But He asking “Why are you persecuting Me?” Then He is also down below (since Paul did not ascend to heaven in order to persecute Him)².

St. Augustine

St. Augustine³ finds that our perception of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the angels ascending and descending to Him is far more important than our presence under the fig tree or under the shadow of death. Concerning the angels, they are messengers from the Lord and His disciples. For example, Paul ascended when he was taken up into the third heaven while he was in the body or out of it, he does not know, but he heard of matters, which cannot be uttered (2 Cor 12:2-4). He himself descended when he spoke to the people of Corinth who were not spiritual but physical and as children in the Lord who had to be fed with milk rather than with meat (1 Cor 3:1-20). **The one who ascended to the third heaven for the sake of the Lord had to descend for His sake to the people. He had to speak to them in the language of immature children in the same way as mothers would speak to their young children.** He ascended and descended and as he says: “For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you” (2 Cor 5:13).

St. Augustine says: [If the Lord Himself ascended and descended, then those who preach about Him ascend through coping Him and descend through preaching⁴.]

ADDENDUM TO CHAPTER ONE

DIVINE GRACE (GRACE for GRACE)

Throughout the whole of his Gospel, St. John the Evangelist presents to us the person of the incarnate divine Word as the **Source flowing with infinite divine grace**. That Source constantly continues to provide grace, especially the gift of creation and God’s adoption of mankind plus an endless list of other blessings. The Evangelist says: “**And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**” (Jn 1:16-17). Previously we have published a book in English about Divine Grace in the School of Alexandria. May the Lord enable us to translate and publish it soon. We would like to present here a simplified explanation of Divine Grace¹.

What does Grace mean?

The fathers of the Eastern Church do not offer any definitions for any theological

² *Sermon on N.T. Lessons 72:6.*

³ *St. Augustine, On the Gospel of St. John, tractate*

⁴ *St. Augustine, On the Gospel of St. John, tractate*

¹ *Fr Tadros Y Malaty: Divine Grace, 1992*

terms- such as grace or other terms. However, they write extensively about the action of grace and its role in the life of the believer from birth to the day he meets the Lord in the clouds.

What occupies the mind of the Church, especially the Church of Alexandria, is the living experience and union with the Lord. This is the pledge for the enjoyment of eternal life. Therefore we are not surprised to find that **Origen** uses the name of ‘**Christ**’ to refer to His gifts or His grace². In other instances, he calls the Lord Jesus Christ ‘the Kingdom in one Person.’ This is because anyone who enjoys the kingdom of God is actually enjoying the Divine Word Himself: He is the Giver of grace and the Provider of all needs.

Benjamin Drewery has attempted to present a definition of divine grace by studying the many writings of **Origen**. He states that we could presume that had we asked Origen to provide a definition for grace he would have responded as follows: ‘Grace is the power God grants freely; yet it is not granted unconditionally. It is offered to mankind so that through that power redemption leads us to a new life achieving sublime heights. This new life is proclaimed and mapped in the Holy Bible and through the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ: for through Him His kingdom is set up in the world’³.

Grace and the Word of God

When we are covered by divine grace we are embraced by the sublime love of God that we cannot measure in terms of height, breadth, depth, or height. We just have to read the Holy Bible in order to absorb God’s wonderful promises.

God has indeed created mankind to communicate with Him face to face. Our first parents enjoyed hearing God’s voice as they walked in Paradise (Gen. 3:8). However, when man turned his back to the Source of Grace, God did not abandon him but gave him the **Law** in order to raise him to attain the wealth of His grace. The **Holy Bible** is not merely some paper with printed words but behind these there exists a live meeting with the incarnate Word.

Whoever enjoys the grace of comprehending the mysteries of the Holy Bible enjoys

❖ It is impossible to receive any good thing when we are away from God. An above all benefit is the understanding of the Holy Book that is written by inspiration¹.

❖ **Not all are able to comprehend the spiritual content granted by the Law. Only those who have been granted the grace of the Holy Spirit can attain the Word of wisdom and knowledge².**

❖ Let us pray God to open up our minds to the Lord Jesus Christ so that the Word grows within us and enable us to comprehend His holy words.

❖ Many strive to interpret the Holy Bible... but not all succeed because **God has granted this grace to only a few³.**

Origen

❖ **‘My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag
Behold he stands behind a wall
He is looking through the windows,
Gazing through the lattice’ (Song of Sol. 2:9)...**

² Benjamin Drewery, p. 109.

³ Drewery: *Origen and the Doctrine of Grace*, London 1960, p. 48.

¹ *Sel. Ps. 1:2.*

² *De Principiis, perf.8.*

³ *In Jer. hom.6:3.*

This verse could be interpreted as follows: From now on, do not speak to me using the symbols of the prophets and the law. So that I can see you, **appear to me so that I may come and enter into the Rock, the Holy Bible, and leave behind me the wall of the Law.** So that I may hear you, let your Voice ring in my ears. If Your voice sounds so very sweet as it flows from the windows of the prophets, seeing Your beautiful face will bring so much more love and joy!!

The bride comprehended the mystery of the Rock in the Bible for the Word led her there by various ways and means (Heb 1:11) while He was standing by the window. Now, she wants Him, the Bridegroom, to appear in the flesh so as to see God incarnated and to hear His divine promises of eternal joy for all the deserving ones. Note how the words of Simon conform to the desire of the bride: “ Lord now you are letting Your servant depart in peace according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation” (Lk 2: 29,30). Simon saw what the bride wanted to see. Similarly, all those who have accepted the sweet Voice of the Lord have acknowledged the grace offered in the Bible and have cried: “ Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...” (Jn. 6: 28)⁴.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

The Grace of the Creation

In our interpretation of the expression ‘**grace for grace**’ we have seen how God the Father of all mankind spreads His hands to grant everyone grace out of His generosity. It is true that there are blessings that are shared by all mankind, but there is also the special blessing or grace that the people of God have enjoyed in the past through faith and through the Law of Moses. However, what the Incarnate Word of God offers through the Cross exceeds all thought: it is the treasure of blessings available to each one who accepts and responds to Him. Probably, the first blessing that mankind has enjoyed is the ‘**creation.**’

St. Athanasius the Apostolic speaks extensively about the grace of the creation. God has not only created mankind into being out of nothing, but He created and blessed him by **the grace of being in His image and likeness.** Hence men should feel indebted to Him for all their lives. In this way men can experience a heavenly ‘paradise like’ life, and comprehend the mystery of knowing God and communicating with Him. Consequently, a person emulates Him and sees and lives eternally with Him. St. Athanasius explains the work of the Word (the Logos) the Creator who grants the grace of making us in the image and likeness of God. He has redeemed this nature by renewing it after it was corrupted.

❖ As long as we preserve this divine feature ‘**Tautotis**’ we will never lose the feeling of God’s presence; or stop leading a life of fellowship with the saints. As we regain the grace that God grants us we come to possess the special power coming from the Word of God the Logos. We find joy as we speak with God and lead a truly blessed and eternal life where there is no pain and no death. Since no obstacle will prevent us from divine knowledge we will constantly perceive, through our being pure¹, the Image of God- that is God the Logos- who has created us in His image and likeness. We will be astonished constantly as we comprehend God’s plan for the creation through the Logos.

Consequently, we ascend sublimely above all that is physically tangible and we get

⁴ *Sg of Sol. Fr Gregory of Nyssa, translated by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 5.*

¹ *This refers to the purity of man’s first condition. (refer to Dr Wahib Kozman: Grace according to St. Athanasius-Center for Studies of the Fathers, Cairo, 1993*

engaged in the divine truths that are real² in the heavens through the power of the mind. Only when our minds are not preoccupied by any external or other physical matters that arise out of the desires of our bodies is this possible. Indeed, our minds will have become perfectly sublimated and perfected in the same way as they had been created in the beginning.

As we put aside all tangible and human matters, we ascend to the highest heavens; and as we behold the Logos we see in Him the Father, the Father of the Logos, and experience the overwhelming joy of this revelation and our yearning for him is renewed.

This is similar to the condition of the first man created and named Adam (according to the Hebrew language). The Holy Bible tells us that at the beginning Adam's mind was focused on God and he was never turned down. He lived in fellowship with the saints as he contemplated on the real facts that he learned in that place which holy Moses named symbolically as 'Paradise.' At that time, the soul was truly pure and able to perceive God Himself and consequently see itself as in a mirror. This is according to the Lord's words as He says: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"³.

Fr Athanasius the Apostolic

The Grace of Freedom

God has granted our reasoning nature the freedom of will. He has blessed mankind with the power to define his needs in order to implement goodness in our lives. There is no forcing or involuntary action but all is the result of our own free choice. The enjoyment of free will leads us to the discovery of great truths. Naturally, if we abuse this free will we become, according to the words of the apostle, like the one who has invented evil things (Romans 1: 30). Everyone who proceeds from the Father is our brother, but as for those who refuse to join in doing good deeds then he has come to that of his own free will⁴.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

The Grace of the Law

The law, whether we are speaking about natural law or the Law of Moses, is in itself a great grace. It is offered by God to prepare the way for the grace of Holy Bible. Yet there is no point of comparison between the shadow and the reality.

❖ The grace we have is not like the one given to them (the Jews). For we have received not just forgiveness for sins; but also righteousness, sanctification, adoption, and the Holy Spirit that overflows with brightness as well as joy and wealth. By such grace we yearn for God as we are privileged to be His children and friends and not as slaves. St. John describes this condition as having '**grace for grace.**' **Even the things that pertain to the law are considered to be a grace...since mankind have accepted the law as an expression of kindness, forgiveness, love and grace**¹.

❖ There was sanctification, and now there is the sanctification

There was baptism, and now there is the baptism

There was sacrifice and now there is the Sacrifice

There was an altar, and now there is the altar

In the same way, there was grace but now there is the grace.

In the first instance the words had symbolic value while in the second instance they

² That can be comprehended by the sublime mind, free from physical sensations, as that enjoyed by the heavenly ones.

³ The Gospel to the Atheists: Fr Morcos Daoud, Ch.2: 2-4.

⁴ Sg of Sol. By Fr Gregory of Nyssa; translated by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 2.

¹ Hom. 14 PG 59:81.

indicate truths carried by the same Voice but not bearing the same meaning².

St. John Chrysostom

The Grace of Recovering What We Had Lost

When man lost his likeness to God his life became an unbearable hell. Paradise became a prison and the earth grew thorns and thistles. However, the grace of God would not remain as a helpless onlooker whatever the cost would be. Even if that meant that the Word had to become incarnate and proclaim His love by accepting death and the crucifixion. In this manner, He would grant us the joy of the resurrection, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His Holy Spirit gives back God's likeness in us.

❖ Therefore, how can this materialize? Who can be called upon to retrieve such grace other than the Word of God who, at the beginning, has created all things out of nothing? The truth is that He alone is involved in transforming that which is corrupted into incorruption and above all in achieving God's will. Besides, He is the Word of God the Father who is above all; He alone has power to retrieve what has been lost and to restore it to everyone; He alone can suffer for everyone's sake, and He alone can be everyone's Intercessor before God³.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

The Grace of Resurrection and Victory over Death

The Lord Jesus Christ tells Martha: "**I am the Resurrection.**" The body of Lazarus had suffered corruption as he had been dead for four days. In the same manner, corruption is present in every soul and body for man reeks from corruption due to death under sin. Therefore the "Resurrection" has come to grant us Himself and thus can enjoy fellowship with Him. He can liberate us from the power of death and no corruption can befall us. Through the power and victory He grants us we sing with Paul the Apostle:

"O death where is your sting?

O Hades, where is your victory?"

The sting of death is sin...but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15: 55-57). This is the grace of Resurrection.

❖ For the incarnate Logos to restore the state of incorruption to those who fell into corruption, and in order to raise them from the state of death, the Lord Jesus Christ had to put on their body. In this manner he could vanquish death and remove it through the grace of His resurrection, like fire that devours grass¹.

❖ Death has truly died...it is no longer disturbing. On the contrary, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ tread on death as they have no issue with it. Indeed, they would rather die than deny their faith in the Lord. This is all because they know that they will not expire through death and that they will live through the resurrection and become incorruptible².

St. Athanasius the Apostolic.

The Grace of God the Father's Adoption

The divine Word is the Son by nature, born of the Father and Light from

² Hom. 14 PG 59:79.

³ The Incarnation of the Word 7: 4,5.

¹ The Incarnation of the Word 8: 4.

² The Incarnation of the Word 27:2

Light. Through Him we receive the grace of God the Father's Adoption:

❖ God commanded us to be baptized 'in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (Matt 28:19). He did not command us to be baptized in the name of the 'Creator and the created.' Although we are one of the creatures, yet we become perfected (through baptism) and **consequently become His Children**³.

St. Athanasius the Apostle

❖ If someone among you is enslaved to sin, let him **be totally prepared, through faith, for the new birth in freedom and adoption**. By discarding slavery to corrupt sin and resolving to be slaves to the redeeming God, we become worthy of inheriting the kingdom of heaven...

"Put off ...the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts..." (Eph 4:22) by confession, in order "to put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created Him," (Col 3: 10).

Through faith you will receive "...the Spirit ...as a pledge," (2 Cor 1:22) and you will consequently be received into the everlasting habitations (refer to Lk 16:22).

Come so that you may receive the mysterious seal whereby the Lord will clearly recognize you; and be counted as one of Christ's spiritually sanctified flock. You will be assigned to sit on His right and inherit the life He has prepared for you. As for those who are dressed in the defiled clothes of sin, they will stay on His left for they have not come through Christ to receive **God's grace by being born anew through baptism**.

By being born again I mean a new spiritual birth of the soul. Our tangible parents give us a physical birth but our spirits are born anew through faith. Since '**the Spirit blows where it wishes...**', and if your conscience is no longer smeared by the sin of deceit⁴, you will be found worthy to hear the Voice saying:

"Well done, good and faithful servant..." (Matt 25:21).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

The Grace of the Holy Spirit

The event of the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ has often occupied the heart of St. Cyril the Great. He considers that the whole Church is the Body and Christ is the Head. Although the Holy Spirit belongs to the Lord and is inseparable from Him as they are of one essence, yet He descended upon the Lord at His baptism to allow the Church to enjoy the Spirit too. Hence the grace of the Holy Spirit is a gift to His Church and to each of her members from the Giver of all blessings and gifts. **He has granted us the grace of the Holy Spirit that reproofs us for sin, condemns the enemy of goodness who seeks our destruction, and grants us Christ's righteousness**. He offers us the Truth - i.e. Christ the Lord-, renews our nature, leads us in the Way - that is Jesus Christ, and unites us with God according to the rights we have received through Christ's Blood. Indeed, the Holy Spirit grants us fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the heavenly ones as well as with one another.

❖ In the same way, the words of the Psalmist can be interpreted (Ps 44: 7-8) to indicate that had the Logos not anointed Himself with the Spirit, we could not have become partners with the Holy Spirit, nor could we be sanctified. For the incarnated Word who grants the Holy Spirit anointed Himself with the Spirit for our sakes. Therefore it is we who have received the Holy Spirit when it was reported that he had

³ *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:1:42*

⁴ *Essay 2:1.*

been anointed in the flesh. His Body was first sanctified when He was conceived to be man and then His Body received the Spirit. As a result, we receive the grace of the Holy Spirit as we take from Him the ‘fullness of the Lord’¹.

St. Athanasius the Apostle

❖The Spirit is poured upon us; whereas in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was in the image of man, the Spirit settled upon Him...in our case, the generosity of the Giver provides fullness, whereas the fullness of the Holy Spirit lives in a perfect state within the Lord Jesus Christ forever. He pours within us according to our needs and what He grants is neither separated nor divided. In contrast, the Lord possesses the whole and perfect unity with the Spirit that enlightens the vision of our hearts and shines according to our ability of endurance. Ultimately, we receive as much as our progressive minds demand in order to achieve the fullness of the intangible Holy Spirit. Yet He contributes by working within us and according to the potentials of our nature².

St. Ambrose

The Grace of Fellowship in the Divine Nature

The Word of God put aside His own Self and put on the image of a slave in order to grant us the power of attaining sublime inner glory. In this manner we become the object of God’s joy as He finds His kingdom set up within us. The heavenly ones also rejoice for us as they glorify God for the richness of this sublime grace.

As we experience daily this inner glory in spite of the bitter storms of this world, we get to perceive the wondrous heights of glory that will be attained when we meet our heavenly Bridegroom upon the clouds. We will then carry His image and be received as a heavenly bride and as a queen seated at the right hand of the King of kings. This is the grace of fellowship in the divine nature and that works within our inner depths.

❖What a wondrous mystery! The Lord yields to descend, and man ascended!

❖The Apostle says: ‘Know ye not that ye are the temple of God...’ (1 Cor 3:16). The Gnostic (the believer who possesses true spiritual knowledge) is, accordingly, divine since he becomes actually sanctified, and carrying God while also being carried by Him.

❖The Holy Spirit is God’s farmer as He grants us to be heirs of the great and divine Father. This task cannot be transferred to any other as He deifies us by granting us heavenly knowledge and setting His laws in our minds and inscribes them within our hearts¹.

St. Clement of Alexandria

❖The Word of God became Man, in order to teach man how to become a god².

❖The Lord Jesus Christ shared our humanity with us in order to grant us a wealth of His riches³.

Pope Cyril the Great

❖It is said that the Lord Jesus Christ as a man received what he always possessed as a

¹ *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:1:50*

² *Of the Holy Spirit 1:8:93.*

¹ *Protr. 11:3; Stromata 7:13; Protr.11.*

² *Pret. 1.*

³ *In Luc. (Conc. The Temptation of Jesus Christ.*

God. We too could receive this grace that was granted to Him. Indeed, the Logos did not diminish by taking on the flesh and by seeking to receive grace. He not only deified that flesh that He put on but further granted that grace of the Holy Spirit to mankind⁴.

St. Athanasius the Apostle

❖ David, as a renewed person, rightly screamed to God “ Then will I go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy...” (Ps 43:4). He also said that he had grown old among his enemies...and here he says that his youth has been renewed after experiencing old age and man’s fallen state. For we have received renewal through baptism and through the Holy Spirit poured within us; and we shall also be renewed through the resurrection. As David says in another passage: “ So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s...” (Ps 103:5). Therefore know the way in which we are renewed: “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow...” (Ps 50: 7). And in Isaiah: “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Is. 1:18). **Anyone who gets changed and moves away from darkness- the darkness of sin- to the light of virtue and to grace, has been renewed truly.** That is how a person who was previously smeared with foolish corruption now brightly shines whiter than snow⁵.

St. Ambrose

❖ The Lord Jesus Christ says: “ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets, and those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her children under her wings, and you were not willing! (Matt 23:37). These words are consistent with our assumption that the Divine Nature has wings, and this is what the holy inspired passage states for a mysterious and unknown purpose. Since we know that the first man was created in the image of God and in His Likeness in every thing (Gen 1:26), then we may deduce that the first man was created with wings in order to be like the Divine Nature. It also becomes clear that the word ‘ wings’ could refer to God, and they represent His power, grace, incorruption and everything divine. Man possesses all these qualities as long as he is like God in every way. However, our tendency to be evil has deprived us of our wings (We were not under the protection of God’s wings, and our own wings were torn away from us). Therefore the grace and blessings of God appeared to us and enlightened our minds. Hence we could grow wings by being pure and righteous and after despising worldly desires and turning to God wholeheartedly¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

The Grace of Acquiring the Life of the Lord Jesus Christ

❖ Through the generosity of Him who grants us the greatest of all gifts: His own life².

St. Clement of Alexandria

❖ (When He became man) we have become enabled to acquire Him, in that way and

⁴ *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:1:34.*

⁵ *Prayer of David, Book 4:9:35.*

¹ *Sg of Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 15.*

² *Paedageogus 1:9.*

in grandeur and with the same nature which belongs to Him, if we prepare a worthy place for Him within our souls.

❖The Lord Jesus Christ, who is all virtuous, and speaks on the principle that the kingdom of God is within His disciples and is neither here nor there³.

Origen

The Grace of the Fragrant Smell of the Lord Jesus Christ

❖This is how St. Paul likened the bride who shares the virtues of the bridegroom. He likened His fragrance to the beauty that cannot be approached. Of the fruits of the Spirit is love, joy, peace and all the like. He made his fragrance and became worthy to be ‘ a sweet savor of Christ’ (2 Cor 2:15). **St. Paul inhaled this incomprehensible grace that surpassed all blessings, and offered himself to others as a sweet fragrance out of which they could draw according to their capacity.** It depends upon each person’s determination. St. Paul the apostle became a fragrance, whether in his life or death. If we were to place the same fragrance before a beetle and a pigeon, the effect will not be the same on both: whereas the pigeon may become stronger upon inhaling it, the beetle may die on the spot. The same applies in the case of the holy fragrance and with the great apostle St. Paul who responded like the pigeon⁴.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

The Grace of Virtue

❖We truly can describe the soul of St. Paul as a spiritual paradise as it bears the seeds of virtue for **grace flourished deeply within him.** Moreover, he constantly prepared his depths to enable his growth and development in grace. And when he became a chosen vessel he worked hard to purify himself. Consequently, he became worthy to have the Holy Spirit richly poured into him. In this manner, we are provided with multiple and wonderful rivers. It is not only the four rivers that sprang in Paradise, but there are many other rivers that flow every day. It is for everyone of us to drink from them- it is not only for the earth - but for the human souls too making them fertile for the growth of virtue¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖May the Lord God grant us the grace of humility that saves man from many diseases and shields him from many trials².

Fr, Dortheous of Gaza

❖By the grace of God, and since I have left the world, I have not yet uttered one word that I am sorry to have said³.

Fr. Bamboo

❖None of God’s gifts to mankind have been offered as a payment of a debt, but it has been all offered through grace⁴.

³ *Comm. On John, Book 10:4. Com. On Matt. Book 12:14.*

⁴ *Sg of Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 2.*

¹ *Praises of St. Paul, Hom 1.*

² *Translated into Arabic from St. Kiriakos the Archmandrite: St Dortheous: Spiritual Teachings, Essay 2.*

³ *Benedicta Ward, p. 197.*

⁴ *Comm. Rom. 22 on 4: 4 f.*

The Grace of the Father and the Son

Granting Divine grace is one Divine act: it is the work of the Holy Trinity who loves mankind. The Father grants His grace generously through the divine Word that is the power and wisdom of God. He offers grace to us through the Holy Spirit who is the spirit of power and wisdom. For Divine grace is grace of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit doing the one work of the Holy Trinity.

❖ It is impossible for the Father to offer grace and not to grant grace through the Son; for the Son exists in the Father. This is just like finding the rays in the sunlight. Yet this doesn't reflect a need or a weakness in God but it does indicate the Father who 'has established the earth through His wisdom' (Prov. 3: 19). He made all things through the Word that was born from Him and He brands the holy washing (by the baptism) in Jesus Christ. He has created all things through His Word- the Logos Himself – and fulfilled the holy wash in the Son. The Son is found wherever the Father is. This is just as true as finding the rays wherever the light is found.

This explains why Jesus promised the holy disciples saying: "... We will come to Him and make our home with him..." (Jn 14:23); and "that they also may be one in Us...just as We are one..." (Jn 17:21, 22). This indicates that grace is one and granted by the Father through the Son. St. Paul explains this in all his letters: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom.1: 7; 1Cor 1:3; Eph. 1:2)⁵.

❖ For there is one grace proceeding from the Father through the Son just as there is one light proceeding from the sun and its rays. Moreover, just as the sun shines through its rays, so does St. Paul send- in the same manner- his wishes to the people of Thessalonica and says: "Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you..." (1 Thes.3: 11). Consequently, the unity of the Father and the Son is maintained. St. Paul does not say: (God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ) "both grant" which would make it appear that the nature of grace proceeds from a dual source and granted by two entities- i.e. granted by each separately. Note that he uses the word 'grants *Katavtheinai*' in order to underline **that the Father grants grace through the Son.**

Therefore this '**one grace**' reveals the unity of the Father and the Son; and that all that is granted comes through the Son. There is nothing that the Father does without the Son and the grace that is granted in this manner is assured to those who accept it¹.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

The Grace of the Inheritance of the Kingdom of God

God created us so that we may enjoy immortality with Him who is our Father, and that we may have a place in His divine embrace. This is what preoccupied the heart and thoughts of the Lord Jesus Christ as He carried the shame of the Cross on our behalf: so that we may be granted the gift of His kingdom forever. Indeed, our Lord continues today to prepare for each of us a place for He is concerned about our eternal inheritance.

❖ How have we received grace 'before time infinite' and while we were not even born? Yet we have been born at a time that, had grace not been deposited in the Lord, it would not have come to us. Consequently, on the Day of Judgment, when each one

⁵ *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:2:41-42.*

¹ *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:11-12.*

will receive according to his work, the Lord will say: “ Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matt 25; 34). Then how and through whom has this kingdom been prepared before the time of our creation? It can only be through the Lord: through Him and for this purpose the kingdom has been created before all time. By establishing us on that kingdom as an integral stone we are enabled to participate in the life and grace that He grants us².

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

When **St. John Chrysostom** speaks to us about **the grace of the Inheritance of the Kingdom** he underlines that in this eternal kingdom we will enjoy the grace of being incorruptible. This does not mean that we will be deprived of our body that has shared in the strife with the soul and that has been sanctified through the action of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it means that the body will be cleaned from all traces of corruption and will bear the nature of being incorruptible and so be appropriately ready for eternal life.

❖ He wishes to say: I take off that which is foreign to me, and the flesh is not foreign, but it is corruption that is foreign. Consequently, he says: We do not wish to take it off (i.e. the tent of the body) but we wish to put over it - that is to wear it- that which is incorruptible. Therefore, we take off the corruptible and put on the incorruptible; for we wish to despise what came as a result of sin. At the same time, **we attain all that which the divine grace has granted to us.**

In order to understand that what we put away does not refer to the body but rather refers to corruption and to death, listen to what it latter on says immediately after that: “ For we do not want to take it off but we want to put on over it.” He did not say: ‘ So that that which is not carnal may devour that which is carnal.’ So what did he say? “ So that that which is dead may be devoured by life.” Therefore he is actually speaking about dismantling death and corruption rather than dismantling the body or the flesh...For life which comes to the body through (the resurrection) will not destroy it. Indeed, corruption and death that are found in the body are the destructive forces. Therefore we groan due to the corruption that exists in the body and not due to the body in itself. The body is a heavy burden. This is not the result of its inherent nature but because of the corruption that entered into it later on. Moreover, the body in itself was not created to become corrupt but rather to be incorruptible. Besides the body still retains this feature even though it has become susceptible to corruption. This explains why the shadow of the apostles pursued the ethereal spirits. Even the clothes they wore healed the sick and restored their health. Do not tell me about the diseases of the body and other matters claimed by the opponents of the body; for all these things were not part of the nature of the body: they resulted from the corruption that entered into it later on.

If you desire to know the reality and worth of the body, study carefully how each member has been created, shaped, the intricacy of their functions and how they are coordinated and work harmoniously. Then you will be assured that such a performance is more ideal than the performance of any city that respects its laws and all its citizens are wise¹.

St. John Chrysostom

The Grace of Being Immortal in Him

² *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:2:67.*

¹ *A Translation by Dr Said Hakim (The Orthodox Center for the Study of the Fathers- Cairo): PG 50:417-432.*

❖ For now the Word has become Man and has taken on all that pertains to the body, yet these aspects no longer affect the body since the Logos has resided within them and they have been destroyed through Him. Therefore mankind is no longer sinful and dead according to their own inclinations for they have risen according to the power of the Logos. Thus they remained incorruptible and unvanquished by death forever. When the Lord Jesus Christ took on a body from St. Mary the mother of God, it was said that He was born although He is the One who grants the origin of life to others. Now He Himself has come to represent our origin so that we might not return to earth as being mere dust of the earth. For once we have become united with the Logos He has transferred all the other weaknesses of the body to Himself and thus granting us to participate in eternal life not as human beings but as someone who belongs to the Logos.

We no longer die on account of Adam and according to our first creation. For our origin and the weakness of our flesh has been transferred to the Logos. We now rise from the dust since He has washed the curse of sin away who lives within us and Who has become a curse for our sakes.

For we all who are of dust die on account of Adam. However, we have been renewed from above and the origin of our nature has been restored to us through the water and the Spirit. We have been revived through the Lord Jesus Christ and our bodies are no longer earthly. Indeed, it has become deified (as it has received the feature of the Logos). This is the result of the wisdom of God who for us became flesh²

❖ For if you oppose the issue of my liberation from the corruption in my nature, then be careful not to oppose the Word of God Who has lifted up from me the image of slavery. It is He who became incarnate and became man and accordingly we have become deified by the Logos. Therefore He has carried us in Him through the flesh and as a result we have become heirs to eternal life from now on³.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

The Grace of Knowing and Enjoying the Divine Truth

God Almighty has created man with a yearning to become acquainted with the eternal and unchanging truth. The Lord Jesus Christ presented Himself as ‘The Truth’ and the person who receives Him consequently enjoys knowing the truth which is a free and divine grace.

❖ ‘We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life (1Jn 5:20). And God adopted us that we became His children through the Lord Jesus Christ and through grace for we share His Spirit since ‘...as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name’ (Jn 1: 12). Thus, the Son is the Truth and He says accordingly: “ I am the Truth”; and when He speaks to the Father He says: “ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (Jn 14:6; 17:17). By speaking with Him, we become righteous and we become His children¹.

❖ It is evident that mankind is truly ignorant. The Logos, however, being Himself God the Word knows all things even before they occur. For when He became man He did not cease to be God, and He did not stay away from the concerns of man due to His being God. On the contrary, being God He became incarnate and in this way He

² *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:33.*

³ *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:34*

¹ *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:19.*

deified that flesh. To answer all questions He resurrected the dead revealing that He who restores life and spirit to the dead ultimately possesses the secrets of everyone. He actually knows where Lazarus lay, for He is the Logos and the totally holy God who for our sake bore all things; but He still asks so that **by partaking of our ignorance He grants us the grace of Knowledge**. It is the grace of knowing His Father, the only true one, and of knowing that He is the Son who has been sent to redeem us all: what grace can be greater than this? ²

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

❖ ‘Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before you. Nevertheless I am continually with You’ (Ps.73: 21-22)...That is how man appears: he is like a stray beast compared to - not Christ - but even to the angels. However, even if this is the case, we need not despair for the Lord ‘preserves both man and beast’ (Ps36: 6). Therefore, since I have learned through You and not through my own resources, I adhere to You constantly in order to stop being a beast. At this point You will tell me: **“But as for you, stand here by Me...!”**(Deut. 5:31). When man, due to his ignorance becomes arrogant and assuming - and that is comparable to bestiality; **he has to start anew and become a man. This occurs when he is embraced by the grace of God**. He will be enabled through reason and grace to prove that he is a human being by that very act. Consequently, he will rejoice for he has become separated from the stray beasts, and will have become one with those that God supports and protects. For what is man but he of whom the Lord is ‘mindful’ (Ps 8:4) ³.

St. Ambrose

❖ The strings of ignorance can quickly be removed through human faith and divine grace. Our sins too are erased through the medicine of God’s Word. Hence all our sins are washed away and we are no longer attracted or confused when faced by sinful ways. We do not go back to the old nature we had before being washed since knowledge comes hand in hand with enlightenment: in one moment we, who are ignorant, hear that we have become the disciples of the Lord. All instruction leads to faith, and we learn faith as we get baptized by the Holy Spirit. That faith is the one and ultimate salvation for all mankind.

St. Clement of Alexandria

The Grace of Being Steadfast in the Father and the Son

❖ ‘By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit’ (1 Jn.4: 13). Due to the grace of the Holy Spirit that has been granted to us we abide in God and He abides in us. The indication here is that through the coming of the Spirit of God to abide within us, we too are counted to be in God and He in us for we have the Spirit.

However, we do not abide in the Father in the same manner as the Son who exists in the Father. The Son is not a partaker of the Spirit in order to abide in the Father as a result. Moreover, He does not receive the Holy Spirit in the same manner that we do. Rather, it is the Son who grants the Holy Spirit to everyone.

The Holy Spirit does not tie the entity of the Logos to the Father but, to be more precise, it is the Holy Spirit that receives from the Logos. Note that the Son abides in

² *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:38*

³ *Prayer of David, Book 3.*

the Father as He is the Father's own Word and the rays issuing from Him; whereas we are strangers to God if we lack the Holy Spirit or are estranged from Him. When we partake of the Holy Spirit we become united to God. As a result, we abide in the Father, not by our own merit but through the Holy Spirit that is within us. We have to strive to keep Him through confession and St. John says accordingly: 'Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God' (1 Jn. 4:15)

¹

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

The Grace of Contentment and Joy

❖ 'My tears have been my food day and night while they continually say to me "Where is your God?"' (Ps 42:3). **Tears are appropriately called bread/food** here for there is a hunger for righteousness. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled (Matt 5:6). On that account the tears become as bread since they strengthen and support a person's heart (see Ps 104:15). See also the words written in the Septuagint that are relevant to this subject: 'Cast your bread upon the waters' (Eccl 11: 1: LXX) for **this is where the bread of heaven is found: where there is the water of grace.** Truly, it is out of the hearts of those who believe in Him that living water flows (see Jn 7: 38; 10:4). They will receive help and encouragement from the divine Word as well as food of a mystical (internal) nature. Besides, this living bread (Jn 6:51) is found where tears and crying are the result of repentance: it is written: "They shall come with weeping and with supplications I will lead them (Jer 31:9 LXX). Consequently, **blessed are those whose tears are their bread** for they deserve to laugh and according to His word "blessed are you who weep!" (Lk 6:21) ².

❖ 'I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast' (Ps 42:4). Truly, He cried because he lived on this earth while the heavenly places were waiting for him He would enter into the sanctuary of the Almighty at the right time (Ps 84:2,3,10). He has truly preferred and pursued this course above all the wealth of his kingdom. He testifies to that in another place where he says: One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord (Ps 27: 4). The beauty of the Lord is found in His Church.

The Church is the icon of heaven: after the shadow passes away the icon truly appears clearly (refer to Heb 10:1; Col 2:17)...and the shadow is the Jewish Council that includes the Law; whereas the truth resides in the Gospels. That is why the icon of truth shines in the light of the Gospels. This explains why the Psalmist wept as the blessings were withheld although they were abundant and perfectly available with grace and joy³.

St. Ambrose

The Grace of Light

❖ **The soul crosses over from falsehood to the truth, and replaces the image of her dark life by one of ultimate grace.** St. Paul the apostle and bride of our Lord Jesus Christ crossed over from such darkness and into the light. He tells his disciple Timothy, just as a bride would tell her bridesmaids, that he has become worthy to be beautiful even though he was previously a 'blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man' (1 Tim. 1:13). He also says that the Lord came into the world to give light to

¹ *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:24*

² *Prayer of David, Book 4:2:7.*

³ *Prayer of David, Book 4:2:9.*

those sitting in darkness. The Lord did not call the righteous but sinners to repentance; and thus they shone ‘ as lights in the world’ (Phil 2:15). This occurs through the second birth that washes away the earlier dark image¹.

❖ The queen of Ethiopia visited King Solomon after hearing about his wisdom. She offered him presents of gold, precious stones, and perfumes (1 Kgs. 10:1-3). The secret behind this visit is revealed through studying the wonders of the Holy Bible. It is important to know that the Church arose from a dark community and from among nations that worshipped idols. These lived without any knowledge of God and were separated from Him by an enormous gulf of ignorance. However, when **the light of the grace of God** and His wisdom shone, He sent the rays of the True Light to those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. However, Israel shut its eyes to the Light and rejected any fellowship with goodness. In contrast, the Ethiopians, from among the heathen, hurried into the faith. Those who were far away drew close after they had washed themselves of the darkness by the holy water. The Holy Spirit led them to God and they presented gifts to the King: incense for asceticism and worship, gold for recognition of God the King, and precious stones for the commandments and acts of virtue².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

The Grace of Preaching and Witnessing

❖ Why were the angels not sent to preach the Gospel? So that man would not have an excuse for his laziness and carelessness. He would have justified himself by claiming that human nature is different than that of angels for that is a great difference.

It is truly strange that the word pronounced by an earthly tongue has the power to uproot death, forgive sins, restore sight to the blind, and transform the earth into a heaven. This leads me to wonder about God’s power. Besides, **my wonder and respect increase for Paul’s zeal to attain this grace and to orient and prepare himself in order to be worthy to receive it.**

I encourage you to follow this high example of virtue rather than simply be amazed. In this manner you will also become worthy to share with him his crown. Do not be surprised to know that it is possible for anyone to become a servant like St. Paul if he follows his example and leadership. Then that person will repeat in his heart St. Paul’s words: “ **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing** (2 Tim 4:7,8).

Notice how he invites everyone to join him in his achievements and consequently in the reward that is also offered and extended to all.

Let us all strive so as to prove ourselves worthy of receiving the blessings promised to us. Let us look at the greatness and glory of a virtuous life as well as meditate upon the fixed goal through which this grace will be attained. **Let us be aware that Paul did not possess a nature that is different from ours in any way, for he was like us. This illustrates that what seems to be hard and impossible to us has become easy and light.** For after a short time of struggle and work we too will wear the eternal crown of incorruption by the grace and goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ to whom is the glory and the power now and forever and to the end of all ages. Amen¹.

¹ *Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 2.*

² *Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 7.*

¹ *Praises of St. Paul, Hom. 2.*

St. John Chrysostom

❖ We now find him revealing an ecclesiastical role as he says that **those who have been led by grace and have become witnesses for the Word do not conceal the truth or keep it to themselves. Rather, they preach it to those who have followed them.** That is why the virgins tell the bride, who has met the truth face to face at first and enjoyed goodness and who has now deserved to become acquainted with the hidden mysteries: “ We will be glad and rejoice in you, we will remember your love more than wine” (Song of Sol 1:4)².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

A Dynamic Grace

For our benefit, the following is said of the Lord Jesus Christ: ‘ And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him’ (Lk 2:40). Also this verse: ‘And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men’ (Lk. 2:40). Origen comments: [He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2: 7)...by the same power used to empty Himself He also grew]. In this manner He brings us to the path of constant growth in grace. For the grace within us is the result of God’s constant and uninterrupted dynamic work.

❖ The use of growth here refers to the growth of the body for through the growth of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ God is proclaimed all the more (through the humanity of the Savior) to those who see Him. And as His divinity becomes more apparent, the grace of His humanity increases as He stands as a person before all peoples. Thus as a child He was carried to the Temple, then as a young boy He remained there and discussed the Law with the priests so that ‘they were astonished at His understanding and answers’ (Lk 2:47)³.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

❖ The Child Jesus grows in various ways within the hearts of those who receive and want Him to live in them: in wisdom, in stature, and in grace (Lk 2:52).

The Lord lives within every pure heart yet in a different way and according to the stature of the person in whom He Lives. He reveals Himself according to the capacity of each one. He therefore appears as a Child or a youth or a mature person just as fruit appears on a branch.

The Lord does not appear in the same way on the Vine for He changes His aspect as time goes by: first as a bud, then taking root, then maturing, blossoming, and finally turning into wine.

When the vine bears fruit it brings with it the promise: it is true that it is not yet ripe enough to give wine but He waits until it reaches the stage of ripeness. **At the same time we are not deprived of joy for we are gladdened the sense of smell as an alternative to taste giving hints of what will be. Through the perfume of hope He grants sweetness to the senses of the soul.**

Steadfast faith in the **hope for grace becomes a source of joy to us** who are waiting patiently. Similarly, our energy and struggle bears the promise of wine. There is no wine but the seed of hope will take root and awaits grace which has not been granted as yet¹.

² Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 1

³ The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:52.

¹ Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 1

❖ Although the stage a person has reached now is really higher than where he was before yet this stage does not limit his progress: it becomes the beginning of discovering a higher grace.

A person who ascends never stops for he constantly moves from one new point to the following one; and the starting points for higher grace are infinite. Therefore the desire of the ascending soul to find knowledge and to go to higher levels keeps increasing and continues to develop. This promotes progress towards the Infinite².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

An All- Embracing Grace

❖ “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22). Divine grace is poured on both the righteous and the wicked (Matt.5: 45). Is He the God of the Jews only or is He also the God of the Gentiles? Indeed, He is the God of the Gentiles as well, and He is truly the One and only God (Rom. 3:29-30). This is what the sublime apostle proclaims³.

St. Clement of Alexandria

❖ Thanks be to God for although the grace of adoption had been limited to Israel it has now become a greater grace than all what was allocated for them. Now it has been poured over the Gentiles through the Lord Jesus Christ⁴.

Origen

❖ Here is another point to contemplate on: ‘Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart’ (Ps 73:1). Does this mean that God is not good to everyone else? He is truly good to all for He is the Savior of all mankind and particularly of believers. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ came: in order to save those who were lost (Lk 19:10). He has truly come to carry the sins of the world (Jn 1:29), and to heal our wounds, yet not all wish to be healed!

Many avoid Him! Lest the leprosy be injected with medicine and so lose its power? He therefore heals those who wish to be healed and who do not reject Him.

Those who wish to be treated regain their health. As for those who resist the Doctor and do not call Him, they will not enjoy His goodness since they have not tried Him!

A person who has been healed regains health and the Doctor is good to those to whom health has been restored. Accordingly, God is good to those whose sins have been forgiven. Nevertheless, if a person has an incurable sin in his soul, how can he/she evaluate that the Doctor is good while at the same time he is avoiding Him?

To reiterate what we have said earlier, the apostle explains, therefore, that God ‘ desires all men to be saved ...’ (1 Tim 2:4), and that He is good to all men.

Concerning the grace of the goodness of God Himself, it is guaranteed to all believers. These receive assistance by His goodwill and grace. However, when the psalmist says: ‘ Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart...’ he is expressing the feelings of those who do not know how to enjoy what belongs to God specifically other than that He is good to all and abides in all¹.

St. Ambrose

² *Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 8*

³ *Stromata 5:3.*

⁴ *Comm. Matt. 10:22.*

¹ *Prayer of David, Book 3.*

The Giver of Grace Prays for on our Account

❖ When the Savior says “All authority has been given to Me...”(Matt 28: 18); and “...glorify Your Son...”(Jn 17:1); and when Peter says: “...angels and authorities and subjects having been made subject to Him” (1 Peter 3:22), we need to understand all these passages in the same light. By that I mean that the Savior utters all these as a human being due to the flesh He has put on. Although He has no need for anything yet He has received everything as a human being and the words are reported as ones spoken by the Lord as one of mankind.

Consequently, as much as the Lord has received, and as much as grace has rested on Him, it is preserved for us. When someone takes for himself alone there is the chance of his losing that which he has received. This occurred in the case of Adam for he lost what he had received.

In order to make grace final - and never confiscated- and preserved for mankind, the Savior received it for Himself and stated that He received authority as a human being. This is the same authority He has always owned as a God.

Hence He who grants glory to others prays: “Glorify Me...” to indicate that He has a body that needs authority and glory. We conclude from this that when He put on the flesh it became the flesh of the Savior who became man in particular. That is why it is reported that it is the Savior who received what was granted to Him².

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

❖ The Logos appeared among us to redeem mankind. He became incarnate in order to sanctify and deify us (that is why He became flesh). It therefore becomes clear to everyone that when he became flesh He received the gifts of the Holy Spirit for our sake and not for His own. For the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are granted by the Father through the Son are given for the benefit of that body that He put on all the while He spoke and dwelled among men.

Let us meditate on the instructions that God demanded; and on what were these gifts that we are told He had been granted. Hopefully the heretics would regain their reason through such an exercise. We wonder that He prayed to be glorified (Jn 17: 1), yet He said: “All things have been delivered Me by My Father...” (Lk 10:22). After the Resurrection, the Lord says that He has received all authority on earth and in heaven (see Matt 28:18). Even before that He actually said: “All things were given to Me” for He is Lord of all for all things were made through Him” (Jn I: 3). We also find in! Cor 8:6 that there is ‘one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things, and through whom we live.’ When He prayed for glory, He was the Lord of glory as He always has been. St. Paul comments: “For had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory,”(1 Cor 2: 8). Also when He prays for glory, He says: “...glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was”; He refers to the glory that He originally had before¹.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

² *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:38.*

¹ *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1 :3:39*

Inspirations drawn from The Gospel of John Chapter One

My Heart Thirsts For You, O Giver of all Grace

- ❖ How do I see You coming to our world
While it is impossible for me to ascend to your heavens!
It is Your love that made You come to Me, You who are the Word and Creator.
You descended to earth to accompany me on my journey!
- ❖ Your incarnation proclaimed your amazing love for me,
My heart is moved and I thirst for You O giver of grace.
You are my life and without You I do not exist.
You are my light and without You I remain in the darkness of my corruption.
You have counted me as one of yours, and have descended so that I may adhere to
You!
- ❖ By your sublime grace You have lifted me up
Every grace from You draws me to enjoy a new flow of graces.
You have created me into being from nothingness,
You have granted me to be in Your image and likeness,
You have offered me the law to assist me and it leads me to realize that I need You.
And finally You have offered Yourself to me, O giver of all grace!
You opened my eyes to behold the grandeur of Your glory!
Your brilliance proclaims that You are the only Son of God!
- ❖ My ears have been opened to hear the call, the voice crying in the wilderness!
That voice that echoes as though in a vast wild desert,
Yet it is a sweet voice that is a forerunner to You O divine Word.
His voice proclaims the Truth,
For You are eternal and One with Your Father.
His voice proclaims his unworthiness to loosen Your sandal straps,
For the mystery of Your incarnation remained until You completed the task of
redemption on the Cross.
Allow me to come and loosen the stings of Your shoes,
So that Your Holy Spirit may reveal to me the mystery of Your salvation!
- ❖ The unborn child John recognized You and shouted joyfully.
Elizabeth heard his voice within her and her tongue sang in praise!
Yet he did not consider this recognition of any value when he experienced Your
baptism!
He introduced You as the One who baptizes with the Fiery Holy Spirit.
You alone are the One who washes the soul with a unique water,
And inflames the heart with the fire of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Your counterpart draw the eyes of all to You as he cried:
Behold! The Lamb of God of whom the prophets wrote and yearned to see!
This is the Lamb of God and the source of the Father's joy!
- ❖ John was happy when his disciples were drawn to You to live with You.
His soul rejoiced to see each one witness to You.

Their hearts were moved to call one another to come to You.
As with Nathaniel, they all left the shade of the dying fig tree,
And came to see the angels ascending and descending around You!
They saw the heavens opened and the heavenly hosts yearning to serve You!
Indeed, my heart thirsts for You,
I will not be satisfied by any other but You, O Source of all grace!



PART TWO

HIS MIRACLES AND DEEDS PROCLAIM HIS DIVINITY

CHAPTERS 2-12

THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF THE SON OF GOD

OR

THE BOOK OF MIRACLES

CHAPTERS 2-12

SEVEN STAGES AND SEVEN MIRACLES

SEVEN STAGES

Some scholars consider that St. John moves powerfully and courageously to select from the works and sermons of the Lord Jesus Christ seven miracles that He performed throughout seven different stages.

The First Stage: The New Beginning (Ch 2-4)

The Gospel of St. John is called **The New Gospel** and it is called the **Book of Genesis for the New Testament** or **The Christian Genesis**. This is because St. John's Gospel presents powerfully to us the story of the renewal of the creation. In this stage we find that the Lord Jesus Christ is present at several meetings where His message focuses on renewal:

❖ **The first meeting occurs at Cana in Galilee** and there He presents a joyful and new Messianic life.

❖ **The second meeting occurs in the Temple** and there He speaks of a new and resurrected Temple (united with the One risen from the dead).

❖ **The third meeting occurs with Nicodemus** and the Lord proclaims the need for the new birth brought about by the Water and the Spirit.

❖ **The fourth meeting occurs with the Samaritan woman at the well** when the Lord reveals the new worship to be offered in spirit and in truth.

In all these meetings the focus is on struggle. What is proclaimed through actions and conversations on these occasions is an extension and an affirmation of the Lord's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount and that revolve upon renewal of our understanding of the Law: "You have heard that it was said to those of old...But I say to you..." (Matt 5: 21-22). On this point, St. Mark cites the Lord's words: "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" (Lk 2:21-22). Hence St. John's Gospel presents the Lord Jesus Christ as the Giver of the new Messianic life, the new resurrected Temple, the new birth, the new worship, and the new Law.

The Second Stage: Jesus Christ the Word and Giver of Life (Ch 4:43- 5:47)

As the Divine Word presents renewal in every aspect of life, the believer needs the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Giver of life.

This stage covers three events that endorse the enjoyment of the Word of God who is the Giver of life:

❖ The healing of the nobleman's son who was at the point of death (Jn 4:47).

❖ The healing of the paralyzed man in Bethesda who had been suffering for thirty-eight years; and whose life seemed to be as one dead and buried (Jn 5).

❖ The Lord's words in which He refers to Himself as the Giver of the resurrection (Jn 5:19-47).

The Third Stage: The Lord Jesus Christ is the heavenly Bread of Life (Ch 6)

Man needs to develop constantly in order to live and not die. This can happen only if he /she receives daily food. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ filled the need of the multitudes with a few loaves. He met with His disciples as He walked over the water and taught them that He is the Bread of life: he who eats of Him would never hunger. Rather, he would enjoy being filled forever and so continue to develop endlessly.

The Fourth Stage: The rejected Lord Jesus Christ (Ch 7- 8)

Whereas the Lord is concerned about us and wishes to offer us the new life and the

new bread so that we may live with Him in His heavens and grow constantly, yet we cannot stand being with Him. The only Son was incarnated for the sake of His people and His people rejected Him. Hence He opened the door to all nations and gentiles so that all may become His own. In the same manner our Lord remains to be rejected by His Church across the generations; while He continues to be a servant even to those who reject Him. He continues to open His arms lovingly so that all may accept fellowship with Him.

The Fifth Stage: The Lord Jesus Christ is the Light of the World (Ch 9-10)

The Lord Jesus Christ wishes to offer the full knowledge of the Truth so that our eyes may be enlightened. Indeed, those who are aware of their blindness are granted light from Him as a free gift/ grace. As for those who claim to enjoy sight, these continue to live in the darkness of their own blindness.

The Sixth Stage: The Lord Jesus Christ is the Resurrection (Ch 11)

The last enemy who threatens the life of man is death, therefore the Lord will not hesitate to come over to our burial place in order to raise us. Hence He affirms that He is the Conqueror of death and Vanquisher of hell.

The Seventh Stage: The Giver of Life through Death (CH 11:55- 12:50)

Seven Miracles

This part covers seven miracles:

- 1- Changing the water into wine at the wedding at Cana (2)**
- 2- Healing the nobleman's son (2)**
- 3- Healing the paralyzed man of Bethesda (5)**
- 4- Feeding the multitudes (6)**
- 5- Walking on the water (6)**
- 6- Healing the man born blind (9)**
- 7- Raising Lazarus from the dead (11).**

CHAPTER 2

THE BRIDEGROOM

The Giver of Joy to the Soul

The Wedding in Cana

In Chapter One, St. John the Evangelist introduces the first disciples. Now, in Chapter two, he presents the first miracle, which is the changing of water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. The Lord had just begun His service in a new Messianic era in which the waters of purification according to the old Law are turned into wine of a new order.

The Jews were anxiously waiting for the Messianic era that would be marked by a bounty of blessings and ultimate joy. Baruch 2:29 expresses this concept: ‘ On every vine there are one thousand branches, every branch bears a thousand bunches, every bunch carries one thousand grapes, and every grape includes a *cor* of wine (about 120 gallons)...this will be enjoyed by those who will be living when the world comes to an end.’ Pappias borrowed this view when he wished to imagine the time of the Lord’s coming in order to rule for a thousand years, and what His kingdom will include in the nature of imaginary vines¹.

In the Gospel according to St. Mark the Lord Jesus Christ begins His ministry as He ‘ came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God...’ (Mk 1:14). In the Gospel of St. John, the evangelist tells us about the beginning of this joyful message by the Lord’s attendance at the wedding in Cana of Galilee and changing the water into wine. He preached through His presence and by restoring joy to the newly wedded and their families and friends. For the kingdom of God is like ten virgins who ‘ went out to meet the bridegroom...’ (Matt 25:1); or ‘ like a king who arranged a wedding for his son’ (Matt 22:1). In the case of Jesus Christ, His presence among His disciples changed their lives into a wedding. When He was asked: “Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” Jesus said to them: “...As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the day will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days” (Mk 2:18-20). St. Paul the apostle says: “...old things have passed away; behold all things have become new” (2 Cor 5:17). Inviting the Lord and His disciples to the wedding was not meaningless for if the Lord Jesus Christ is the bridegroom then the disciples are the first born of the Church of the New Testament: they are the spiritual bride. It is as though the wedding in Cana has been performed according to the Jewish Law and tradition. In its center there is a hidden wedding of which no one was aware: the wedding of the Lord Jesus Christ to His Church which would last forever and until its proclamation on the great Day of the Lord (Rev 21:2) and not for just one week according to the Jewish custom (Gen 29:27; Judges 14:12).

In this Chapter, the Evangelist confirms the following truths:

1- The Lord started His ministry with the wedding in order to reveal His love for mankind. He wishes to carry all peoples to heaven as to the bridegroom’s chamber. We will consequently partake of the heavenly joy, and shine as we reflect the

¹ Fr Tadros Y Malaty: *The Apostolic Fathers*, 1993,p 137.

brilliance of His glory. The Lord affirms that He has come to the world in order to transform our lives into a joyful wedding: the transformation of the waters of our lives into wine is an indication of our eternal spiritual joy (Is.55:1; Eph. 5:18-20).

❖ The Word of God descended from heaven to earth in order to become the Bridegroom of our human nature. He has made our nature His dwelling place so as to engage and lead her. Ultimately this would result in the birth of spiritual wisdom within us.

St. Cyril the Great

❖ He who made wine at the wedding in Cana and changed the water in the six pots is He Himself who does the same thing every year in the vineyards... such an act no longer arouses wonder due to its continual repetition¹.

❖ Is it not amazing that He came to that house for the wedding, and He came to this world for a wedding? Actually, if He has come to a wedding then there is certainly a bride there. Yet, what does the apostle say? “ For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Cor 11:2)... That is how He has a bride here whom He has redeemed with His blood, has granted her the Holy Spirit as a pledge, and has liberated her from the chains of Satan. He has died for her sins and rose again to grant her justification (Rom 4:25). Who would offer such matters to his bride?²

❖ The bridegroom who was told: “ ...**you have kept the good wine until now**”[2:10] is the Lord Jesus Christ who has preserved the new wine- that is the Gospel- until now³.

St. Augustine

2- The Lord transformed the water of purification into wine as his first task is to transfer us from the literal understanding of the Law - where it speaks of purification- to the joy of the Spirit. Hence we would live in a new age with a new beginning. The Lord began His work with the two young wedded persons to underline His interest in youth. He requested to be their friend in order to grant them unending joy.

3- As the Lord brings us into His eternal wedding, He holds it in His holy Temple. Therefore, He cleansed the Temple [2:13-17]. The Jews requested a miracle [18], but He offered the miracle of His death and resurrection [19]. His enemies did not understand His words and even tried to distort them. However, His friends perceived its meaning after His resurrection (Matt 26:62; 27:40; Jn 10:18). The Evangelist takes us from the wedding to the Passover to show us our Lord as He purges the Temple from the sellers and moneychangers. He affirms that the new Temple will be built in three days[19] and so guides our eyes away from the stone temple to the temple in the inner soul where God will build His Kingdom. That is how we have come to possess a new Temple in a new age: a temple that neither grows old nor aged.

1- The Water Turned into Wine [1-12]

2- Purification of the Temple [13-17]

3- Requesting a Miracle [18- 25]

1- The Water Turned into Wine

‘On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there’ [1].

‘On the third day...’ This is how the Evangelist indicates that with every new day

¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 8:1*

² St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 8:4*

³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 8:4*

the Lord Jesus went about doing a new service and a new act. Not a single day of His life on earth passed away without His doing services. In the same manner the lives of all those who are close to the Lord are spent in work and not a single day is lost in idleness.

The statement ‘On the third day...’ carries a symbolic significance since the Lord Jesus Christ Himself came to His Church to celebrate His wedding to her in the third age. The first age was that of the Fathers before the Law was given. The second age is that of the Fathers who lived under the Law. And the third is the age of grace in which the true Light shone on the world to dissipate its darkness.

❖ The wedding is celebrated on the third day- that is in the last age of the world- for the number three indicates the beginning, the middle, and the end¹.

❖ The wedding takes place on the third day- that is at the end of all ages (in the fullness of time). The number three denotes the beginning, middle, and end: these are the three perspectives of all time. This agrees with the saying of one of the prophets: “He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us: On the third day He will raise us up...that we may live in His sight” (Hosea 6:1- 3).

St. Cyril the Great

By saying ‘Cana of Galilee’ the Evangelist wishes to distinguish it from the one with the same name found in Ephraim in the region of Samaria (Joshua 16:8; 17:9).

The Lord began His Ministry in **Cana of Galilee** the place of the tribe of Asher (Joshua 19:28). Jacob had foretold this, when he blessed the tribes, saying: “Bread from Asher will be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties...” (Genesis 49:20). Hence the Lord comes to Asher and offers rich bread to the soul and spiritual dainties to the spiritual kings. The Lord began His work in a small corner of the kingdom, isolated from the capital ‘Jerusalem’ in order to proclaim that He has come to serve rather than seek glory from people. He came to serve the simple who do not resist like the Scribes, Pharisees, chief priests, and other religious leaders.

Bede considers that **Cana of Galilee** means ‘zeal to immigrate.’ It is as though the spiritual wedding is fulfilled with those who have zeal for the race to immigrate away from imperfection to virtues, from the earthy to the heavenly based on hope and love.

❖ By attending to detail we notice that the celebration did not take place in Jerusalem but rather outside Judea. The meeting for the event took place in the country of the Gentiles (Matt 4: 15). It is very clear that the Council of the Jews rejected the heavenly King. Yet, the Church of the Gentiles received Him with a rejoicing heart².

St. Cyril the Great

This is the first Christian wedding to ever take place in the world. It happened according to God’s will otherwise the friends of the groom would not have invited the Lord and His disciples. Besides, the presence of the holy virgin Mary indicated her concern for the wedded for she was a living example of the pure bride who opens her heart with love for everyone.

‘...the mother of Jesus was there...’[1] probably not as one of the guests but as one of the family. This would explain why she realized that they had run out of wine. The guest would not have known that for only those hosting the wedding would be

¹ *Exposition of St. John, PG 73:223-226.*

² *Exposition of St. John, , PG 73:223-226*

concerned. This is important since in this wedding the Lord performs His first miracle in which He links the Old with the New Testament. Since the Virgin Mary descends from the tribe of Judah - one of the families in the Old Testament- she intercedes to her Son in order to restore the lost salvation. The wine of joy had run out, the prophets had been absent for a long time, and sadness and bitterness prevailed among the people.

‘Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding’ [2].

The indication that Jesus and His disciples came to the wedding and stayed for the celebration reveals the spirit of the newly weds, their families, and their friends. They all walked in the path of the Lord. They did not plan for Jesus to come and leave after a short while so that they could switch their behavior and rejoice in an immoral and inappropriate manner.

❖ The Lord attended a wedding once only. This teaches us that a woman should marry once only (as long as her husband is alive. This fact would seem to oppose virginity if we were to fail in giving marriage its rightful significance...the heretics are the only ones who despise marriage and by doing so they step over the Lord’s commandments. As for us, we listen joyfully to the Lord’s words as He praises marriage. The Church does not condemn marriage but rather regulates it by a clause of submission¹.

ST Jerome

❖ The Lord attended the wedding with the main intention of achieving a miracle and not just merely to share in the celebration. Indeed, He wished to sanctify the beginning of a new physical birth for mankind. This is appropriately done by Him who has come to renew the nature of men and bring it into a totally better state. He carries this blessing not only to those who have been born already but also promises it to all who will be born in the future and therefore sanctifying their arrival into this world...through the sanctification of marriage He has put an end to the old sadness and regret of being born².

❖ He came (to the wedding) to sanctify the beginning of His birth - I mean His birth according to the flesh...with the purpose of providing grace and offering it to those to be born. Consequently, He ensures a sanctified birth for them too...

❖ Women have been informed by God “ In pain you shall bring forth children” (Gen 3:16). Was it not of greater urgency to abolish this curse? Otherwise, how do we prevent a fatal marriage? Yet, because our Savior loves mankind, **He is the One who can remove this curse since He is at the core of our joy and happiness. He honored the marriage celebration by attending and so eliminated the shame previously associated with pregnancy.** If anyone lives in the Lord then he is a new creature, and the “ old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor 5:17).

❖ The Savior did not attend the wedding due to His will alone but because He had been invited. That is He was urged and begged by saintly voices. However, the wine ran out and the partakers had none left: this is a reference to the law that does not achieve perfection, and to the Law of Moses that did not give joy. Besides, the laws of nature ingrained within us were incapable of redeeming us.

St. Cyril the Great

❖ We have stated earlier that the Lord was known in Galilee and therefore was

¹ Letter 48:11.

² Exposition on St. John PG 73:276

invited to the wedding. He responded to the invitation for He did not think of His honor but rather His goodness to us. It is He who did not reject to take the form of a slave (Phil 2:7), therefore it seems logical and befitting that He would not resent attending the wedding of His slaves. He is the same who sat with tax collectors and sinners (Matt 9:10) and so it is befitting that He would not reject to be present at the wedding.

Those who invited the Lord were unable to show appropriate acknowledgement to Him. They did not extend an invitation fit for a great One for they invited Him as a simple person and as one of many that they knew. The Evangelist presents this meaning indirectly as he says: ‘...the mother of Jesus was there...’; so they had invited Him just as they had invited her³.

St. John Chrysostom

‘And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “ They have no wine”[3]

The Evangelist does not mention that St. Mary had been invited to the wedding. Until that point he just says that the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples- five of them- had been invited. However, she was there probably because she was one of the members of the family.

When the Lord Jesus Christ is invited through prayer, He comes and brings His saints (disciples) with Him. This transforms the wedding into a sanctified Church, and He blesses generously the newly wedded and all those present from the springs of His heavenly joy.

Some may wonder: Since the Lord had not yet performed any miracles, how did the holy mother Mary know that He could provide wine at the wedding in a miraculous manner?

Although the Lord Jesus Christ had not made any miracle publicly so far, yet St. Mary knew of His divine power, righteousness, and gentleness. She was certain He would do something to fulfill all the needs of the wedding. She was sure that He would step in when necessary to respond to and satisfy any need.

❖ It is appropriate to wonder how the mother got the notion that there is an element of greatness in her Son. He had not done any miracle yet and the Evangelist states: ‘ This is the beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee...’[11]...indeed, the pregnancy itself and the events around it inspired in her great thoughts concerning Him. Significantly, St. Luke comments: “...His mother kept all these things in her heart...” as she heard all these things about the Child (refer to Lk 2:51).

St. John Chrysostom

“ They have no wine”[3]: This is the condition of Israel ever since they have lost the joy of salvation. The prophet Joel tells them: “Awake, you drunkards, and weep and wail, all you drinkers of wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth...”(Joel 1:5). The mother of the Lord, the daughter of Israel, discovered what had happened to her people and therefore shouted out to the heavenly bridegroom. He alone could provide an endless flow of wine and oil (Jn 2:7). On behalf of all mankind, she echoes what her father David says in Psalm 51: ‘ Restore to me the joy of Your salvation...’

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What the holy Virgin proclaims is the result of her own experience of the new

³ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.21:1.*

heavenly wedding. She had realized it when she bent her head down and accepted the incarnation of the Word in her womb. Her depths had then become an unspeakable wedding celebration and she sang : “ My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior...: (Lk1:46).This is the wine of God that brings joy to the spirit, and restores glory and brilliance. Consequently, believers enjoy a constant wedding: “ And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Is. 62:5).

The way the holy Virgin Mary acted reveals the motherhood of a believer and the concern to respond to the needs of others rather than one’s own needs. A believer **turns first to the Source** to receive abundantly and in greater measure than from any other. Moreover, the request is made in a spirit of humbleness as a person presents the situation without offering the solution to God and as though claiming to be more knowledgeable or more loving to others than the almighty Lord.

❖ God is exceedingly generous and He does not despise us as we struggle and hunger for His riches¹.

St. Cyril the Great

‘Jesus said to her: “ Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.” [4]

The Lord did not blame the newly wedded or their parents for not having bought enough wine; neither did He blame His Mother for being concerned. He simply underlined that for every action there is an appropriate and convenient time.

Some wonder why the Lord called His mother ‘ woman.’ However, this vanishes when we find Him on the Cross and He repeats these words: “ Woman, behold your son!” He speaks to her at the beginning of His miraculous deeds to indicate that the process of carrying His Cross has started. As His Person is increasingly revealed, the powers of darkness are enraged and plot for His death. He is not addressing her as His mother since it is not for her to define the hour of His crucifixion. Indeed, it is in the hands of the Father who has sent Him; for the Lord Jesus Christ came to fulfill the Father’s will that He sacrifice Himself to redeem and save the world.

It is true that the holy Virgin Mary was there for His first miracle, yet she was unaware that it was the opening hour of the crucifixion. She remained with Him until the last moment of the crucifixion as she is the representative of the Church. She is the new Eve who accompanies the Second Adam along the path of pain and so He pours His glory over her. After she became pregnant and carried the Lord in her womb, she was told: “...a sword will pierce through your own soul also...”...it started to pierce her soul at the wedding in Cana of Galilee to carry the wounds inflicted by love!

He Lord did not say “ O mother” but rather “ O woman..”, because what He was doing as He transformed the water into wine is not enacted of a man who has taken flesh from her but occurs as a result of His divinity. It is true that there is no

¹ *Exposition on St. John, PG 73:278.*

separation between His divinity and His humanity, and that his actions result from His being the word of God incarnates, yet some acts result specifically from Him as the only Son of God while others proceed from Him as the Son of Man.

Why did He say: “**My hour has not yet come**” yet He did do a miracle at that same time? He wished to clarify to her that the time to publicly enact miracles before the crowds had not yet come even though His work is continuous. He performed the miracle so quietly after the servants brought the water pots to Him that the master of the feast and the bridegroom did not get to know. The servants were the only ones who knew about it [9].

❖ In order to be convinced that the Lord respected His mother, listen to the words of St. Luke as he states that He ‘...was subject to them’ (Lk 2:51); while St. John reveals how He was providing for her in the actual moments of His crucifixion. When the parents do not present obstacles in matters concerning God yet they need to prepare the way for them and it would become a serious danger if that were not so. Nevertheless, if they were to demand an impossible request that would form an obstacle in any spiritual matter then it would be dangerous to obey! The Lord’s answer is a result of that situation, and He replies in another incident by saying: “Who is My mother and who are My brothers...?”(Matt 12:48).This is because they did not think of Him as they should have. As the virgin Mary had given birth to Him, she wanted to direct Him in all things just as other mothers do. However, she needed to honor and worship Him. That explains His response in such situations¹.

❖ The Lord was concerned for others and He used every means to inculcate the right idea concerning Himself. Therefore how much more concerned would He be with informing His mother of such matters².

St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom believes that the Lord would have wished that the request came from those who had the need rather than from His mother. If what the Lord did was in response to the request of a friend , even though it was a great deed, yet some would be suspicious. Whereas if those in need had asked, then there would be no doubts concerning the miraculous act and hence it would have greater benefit. **St. John Chrysostom** likens the Lord to a skillful physician who enters a house full of sick people and although he does not speak to any of the sick or their relatives; yet He speaks only to his mother. This would annoy every body and arouse suspicions.

❖ The Lord wished to indicate that he did everything at the appropriate time and does not do everything instantaneously...He is not obligated necessarily by the times for He has set the order of the seasons and has created them. Consequently, He says “**My hour has not yet come.**” By this He indicates that He has neither been revealed to many nor does He have a body of followers as yet...

Besides, it is as though the Lord is telling her that He should be informed by others rather than by His mother otherwise they would be suspicious of the miracle. It is appropriate that those who need the wine to come and speak to Him- although He is

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.21:2*

² *Homilies on St. John, Hom.21:2*

already aware of their need and does not need to be informed of it-but this would make them unanimously welcome and recognize the miraculous deed fully

When a person is needy, he becomes thankful upon receiving help, whereas someone who does not feel needy will not have any clear feelings towards a benefit he receives¹.

❖ While He is being respectful to His mother yet He is more concerned with the salvation of her soul. He performs that which is beneficial to many and to accomplish that He came in the flesh. Therefore His words proceed from Someone who is stern with His mother but rather from Him who is wise in His plans. He leads her to think correctly, and wishes to ensure that His miracle is accepted with the honor due to it².

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The Lord does not wish to rush into any action as He does not desire to appear as a miracle maker to someone who has not requested anything. Indeed, He waits until the needy invite Him rather than satisfy those who are merely curious. He grants grace to the needy and not to mere spectators seeking to enjoy some sight.

St. Cyril the Great

❖ The Lord of the angels is not subject to time for He has created the times and hours as part of His creation. However, the holy Virgin desired that He would do a miracle when the wine expired. That explains why the Lord immediately answered and as though to tell her clearly: 'I can do a miracle through my Father and not through My mother.' For He who has the same nature as the Father worked miracles that issued from the mother, and this enabled Him to die which He did when He died on the Cross. He knew His mother and He entrusted her to His disciple with these words: "Behold your mother!"(Jn 19:27). Therefore, by saying: " Woman, what does you concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come", He wished to convey that ' the miracle is not a natural part of you and I do not recognize you in it. When the hour of My death comes, then I will know that you are My mother since having accepted that in you I know that I can die'³.

Pope Gregory the Great

Saint Bede adopted the same opinion when he stated that the Lord appears to say: ' there is nothing in common between what I have always possessed through the Father and the body which I took from you in the flesh. The hour has not come when I will prove the human weakness which I have taken from you. First let Me underline My divine and everlasting power.' Nevertheless the hour will come when that which He shares with His mother will be revealed and that occurs when He dies on the Cross as well as when He entrusts His chaste disciple to look after the holy Virgin. When the Lord suffers human weakness He recognizes His mother from whom He inherited this weakness; but when He performs divine acts He appears as One who does not know her. This is due to His knowledge that she is not the source of His divine birth.

¹ Hom. 22. PG 59: 126-127

² Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21:3

³ N & PN Frs. , Series 2, Vol 13:48.

His mother said to the servants “ Whatever He says to you, do it ”[9]

She did not reprimand her Son for His words to her for she understood the mystery at least to a certain extent. She also sensed some signs of acknowledgement so she asked the servants to obey the instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Evangelist uses the Greek word ‘ diaconis’ to reveal that they are the servants fulfilling the divine mysteries and which the Lord adopts to serve His people and bring them joy. The Church of the New Testament uses the term ‘diaconin’ for the deacons who serve at the altar and at the tables (being concerned with the needs of the poor and the sick...).

Being confident in the love of the Lord to serve and in His tenderness, she was sure that He would definitely act and satisfy every shortage. The Holy Virgin asked the servants to turn to Him and obey Him. This is the role of the holy Saint Mary and all the saints: to draw our attention to our Lord and obey Him completely.

❖ She began to work by orienting the servants so that would readily obey Him always.

St. Cyril the Great

❖ She knew that He abstained out of humility and not out of weakness. In order to avoid the assumption that He is imposing Himself and voluntarily rushing to work a miracle, she brought the servants to Him¹.

St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom finds that St. Mary gives us a practical lesson in perseverance through her act. For in spite of the Lord’s response to her, she did not stop working, called the servants, and asked them to obey Him.

‘ Now there were set there six water pots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons a piece.’[6]

Six pots were used to correspond to the days of the week from Sunday to Friday, each pot consecrated for a specific day for purification. As for Saturday, it was a day for worship and rest- no one did any work that required purification.

It is not strange that the Lord transforms the water into wine, for it is He who extracts wine from the earth (Ps 104:14 -15) as He grants the soil to produce vines whose grapes are then pressed and made into wine.

Moses started his miracles during the ten plagues by changing the water into blood that carried bitterness and death. All had broken the Law and were therefore subject to a curse and death. As for the Lord Jesus Christ , He turned the water into wine for He offers the joyful message of salvation. Indeed, He came to save the world and not to condemn it. He came to grant inner fullness an joy. His evangelical invitation is :

¹ Cf. *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21:1*

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...come buy and eat...buy wine and milk” (Is 55:1).

These water pots were used for purification since it was not acceptable for a Jew to eat unless he washed first (Mk 7:3). This water was also used for other rituals relating to purification. A popular saying among the Jews was: ‘The one who uses water the most to wash himself benefits better health in this world.’

These water pots were used solely for water, and wine was not put in them. They were made of stone so that no trace would be left if they had been used for wine before. This is different in the case of clay water pots as they would absorb the old liquids and lend their taste to the new. The water pots were made of stone: Zechariah had seen the stone placed before the face of the Lord and it had seven eyes (Zech. 3:9). This indicates that he had spiritual knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. St. Peter the apostle also saw Him as a living stone that would be used to build the altar of the Lord (1Peter2:4,5).

St. John Chrysostom notes that the Evangelist stresses that this is ‘**according to the manner of purification of the Jews**’ so that all may be aware that they were never used for wine but only for water for purification. He also notes that Palestine is a country known for scarcity of water- there are no canals or sources available every where. Therefore people used to fill water pots with water so that they would not have to rush to the river when they got desecrated at any time. In this way they had instant access to the means of purification¹.

Some believe that the six water pots refer to the six periods of the world that humanity has traversed until the advent of the Lord that will occur in the seventh period (the seventh seal in the Book of the Revelation). It seems to point to believers across the years and generations who have been purified from their sins and drink the joyful spiritual wine. According to **St. Augustine** are:

- A. From Adam to Noah
- B. From Noah to Abraham
- C. From Abraham to David
- D. From David to the Babylonian Exile
- E. From the Babylonian Exile to John the Baptist
- F. From John the Baptist to the end of the world

St. Augustine goes on to say: [Add to that the fact that God created man in His image on the sixth day; and in the sixth period He proclaimed the renewal of our minds through the Gospel so that we might become in the image of our Creator. Moreover the water was transformed into wine so that we might taste the Lord. This is proclaimed in the Law and by the prophets. That is why there were six water pots and He ordered that they be filled with water. These water pots now indicate the six periods that were not without prophecies; and they were divided and were separated, as it were, from the joints...and they will remain empty if the Lord does not fill them up...it is necessary to comprehend and find the Lord in each of these prophecies²].

¹ Cf. *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 22:2.*

² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 9:6*

What do these words convey: ‘...containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece’[6]?St. Augustine explains that the word ‘rain’ in the Greek language ‘metpou’ refer to a certain unit of measure and that the number ‘two’ refers to the Father and the Son, while ‘three’ refers to the Holy Trinity. Note that the Evangelist does not say ‘some water pots containing two and others three gallons of rain’ but said that ‘each one had the capacity to contain two or three gallons of rain.’ In the Books of the Old Testament, the prophecies speak about the Father and the Son (the Lord Jesus Christ) and this included references to the Holy Spirit since He is the Spirit of the Father and the Son at the same time. **St. Augustine** finds that [the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love that binds the Father and the Son together. When allusion is made to two the reference is the Holy Trinity even though this is not expressed. When the allusion to three occurs then the reference is to the Holy Trinity and it is clearly expressed¹].

We stated earlier that the six water pots refer to the six periods that would transpire and lead to the wedding of the Lord Jesus Christ **with the Church that is made up of all nations**².

1- The first water pot starts with **Adam** who carries a union with Eve and so become one body (Gen.2:24). This is similar to the union between the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church (Eph. 3:31).They are the parents of all mankind and not of the Jews only.

2- The second water pot starts with **Noah** the representative of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he placed in his ark **animals and birds from all over the world**.

3- The third water pot refers to **Abraham**, who through his seed , all nations were blessed.

4- The fourth water pot is **David** who sang : “ Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all nations” (Ps 82:8).The tune was set by Asaph the singer.

5- The fifth water pot is the **Babylonian exile** when Daniel the prophet sees the Lord Jesus Christ as a small stone cut out without human hands and it **filled the whole earth**(Daniel 2:34).

6- The sixth water pot relates to **John the Baptist** the greatest born of women. It is said of him that he is greater than a prophet (Matt 11:11). He prophesied about the Lord Jesus Christ and that the Lord is sent for all nations as he says: “...God is **able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones**” (Matt 3:9). This is how St. Augustine sees that the sixth water pot has witnessed the marriage of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church that is formed of all nations. [Because we come from these nations, yet we could not have come from her if God had not raised from the stones children to Abraham. We have become Abraham’s children as we have emulated his faith and not by being born of him according to the flesh³].

‘ Jesus said to them: “ Fill the pots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim’[7].

¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 9:7-8.*

² St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 9:10-11.*

³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 9:16.*

The Lord could have created wine from nothing, yet He transformed the water into wine to stress that He did not come to ignore or abolish the Law. Rather He came to perfect it. Hence the Gospel is a spiritual extension to the Law without being literal. Besides, He intended that those who brought and drank of the water to become themselves witnesses to the actual miracle and testify that it was not mere fantasy.

St. Augustine finds that the water here refers to the Old Testament and ‘ the Law, the prophets, and the Psalms.’ The whole of the Old Testament had the taste of water to those who could not comprehend it spiritually and discover the mystery of the Lord Jesus Christ within it. Now the Lord has come to transform the water into joyful wine that has a new taste and effect. [How did He change the water into wine? When He opened their minds and interpreted the Holy Books to them: starting from Adam and all the prophets and until they became as drunk men and said: “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us ?” (Lk 24:32). They therefore comprehended the Lord Jesus Christ in these Books whereas they had not recognized Him before. That is how the Lord transformed the water into wine and it had a taste it did not have before then. Now it was overwhelmingly intoxicating...a matter that did not exist before... He revealed that the Old Testament was issued from Him just as the water pots were filled with water at His command. They have been truly granted by the Lord in the same way as the Old Testament. However, they had no taste as long as the Lord Jesus Christ was not comprehended through them¹].

In obedience to the Lord’s command, the servants filled the water pots to the brim. In the same way, it is not appropriate for a servant to rest before he /she completes the command and seeks to fulfill, by service, the work of the Lord ‘ the fullness of Him who fills all in all’ (Eph.1:23)... ‘for God does not give the Spirit by measure’ (Jn 3:34). Nothing could occupy a godly person other than the concern that every soul would enjoy fully the glory of the Lord Who is ever near. Consequently he/she would sing: “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (Jn 1:16).

The One who transformed the water into wine, and Who sends rain could fill the water pots with water and then transform them into wine. However, due to His love for mankind, He does not disregard our obligation to work with Him. Since we are capable of filling the water pots, we need to do our best while He completes what is impossible for us to achieve. In the same way, and in many tasks, **He grants us the honor of working with Him and for His Kingdom that lies within us.** He therefore asks of those present to lift the stone from over the grave, and orders Lazarus to come out. He grants life and resurrection. He commands the disciples to free the dead from his grave clothes. We therefore sing joyfully with the Apostle: “...those who work with God...”!

‘ And He said to them: “Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.” And they took it.”[8]

We do not hear that the Lord called upon the name of God or that He prayed to bless the water, but that He issued an order to fill the water pots and then instantly ordered

¹ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 9:5*

to present them. He did not even ask them to give Him some in order to taste it.

The Lord did not perform this miracle in order to publicly reveal Himself. He did it to fulfill a need and so ordered the servants to offer it immediately. He has not granted the talent in order that we bury it but so that we might labor constantly and seize every chance to serve.

The Lord Jesus Christ was not ‘the master of the feast’ but rather the friend of the bridegroom and a Servant to everyone. This is the true seat of leadership and it evident when a person sacrifices himself lovingly and humbly for the sake of others.

‘When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew) the master of the feast called the bridegroom.’[9]

The Greek word used to translate the term ‘drank’ corresponds to the colloquial Arabic word ‘draw’ which is used to indicate extracting from a deep source. Note that the water pots are very deep and have wide openings through which the wine is poured. So it is impossible to do so except by using a serving spoon with a long hand. This is true of a minister presenting the holy mysteries and a preacher of the Gospel as it is appropriate for them to reach far into the depths and draw from the wealth of God’s great blessings. They are like someone drawing from the eternal and divine springs.

‘And he said to him: “Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests are drunk, then that which is inferior; but you have kept the good wine until now.”[10]

St. Chrysostom explains that the testimony comes from the master of the feast so that on one would say that the testimony comes from drunk men who, therefore, do not distinguish water from wine. Moreover, the master of the feast is careful not to get drunk since he is responsible for providing all the matters that concern the wedding in a dignified and wise manner¹.

The Evangelist is specific when he says: **‘When the master of the feast has tasted...’** to indicate that he had not taken any drink, not even of this wine. He just tasted it.

In Cana of Galilee, the Lord Jesus Christ transformed the water into wine and by doing so He created a spiritual joy that spread throughout the celebration. In the New Testament, the Lord - by His Holy Spirit - transforms the wine into His Blood that is sacrificed for our sake, and this results in the creation of a heavenly joy that fills the life of those who partake of It.

❖ The Lord did not just transform the water into wine, but He also turned it into a wine of supreme quality. This is because the miracles of the Lord possess this distinction as they become more brilliant and far better than the quality of things existing in nature. In that respect, when He healed a crooked member in a person’s

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.22:2*

body, that member appeared better than the other healthy parts. The proof is in that water turned into wine and becoming of supreme quality. This is not only the testimony of the servants, but to which the master of the feast witnessed as well.

St. John Chrysostom

‘This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana Of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.’[11]

Here the meaning of ‘glory’ begins to be uncovered in this Book and it signifies the ‘Divine presence.’ **God glorifies us when He proclaims His presence within us; while we glorify Him when we proclaim His presence in the world.** In this verse the presence of the Father in His Son - consubstantial with the Father- is proclaimed and the Son reports about Him.

❖ The One who has made wine from water is able to make bread out of stone for authority arises from the same Source. Satan tempted the Lord by making a similar challenge, but the Lord rejected him, for as you know, when the Lord was tempted the devil suggested this to Him as He was hungry. But it sounded as though Satan could grant Him such power. However, the Lord practiced this (to be hungry) to demonstrate humility. The Bread (the Lord Jesus Christ) was hungry, the path was rough, the Giver of life was wounded, and life was dead...He did not make bread out of the stones. The One who could do so easily- just as He turned the water into wine... yet nothing could defeat the tempter as much as despising him. When the Lord overcame Satan’s temptations, the ‘angels came and ministered to Him’ (Matt 4:11)...

Why did He do this act and not the other?...When He turned the water into wine, what does the Evangelist go on to add? ‘...and His disciples believed in Him’ (Jn 2:11). Was it given to Satan to believe in Him?²

St. Augustine

❖ If someone states: there is not sufficient evidence to show that this miracle is the beginning of the miracles of the Lord and to specify Cana of Galilee where it all started; for it is possible that He could have done other miracles in other places.

Our answer would be as follows: John the Baptist had previously said of the Lord: “**I did not know Him, but that He should be revealed to Israel , therefore I came baptizing with water**”(Jn 1:31).If the Lord had done wonders at an early stage of His life, the Jews would not have been in need for someone else to proclaim Him. Moreover, His previous fame would have spread every where and it would not have been necessary for Him (the Lord) to come among the people and to become known through his miracles. He did so for only three years and He needed this period to reveal Himself not only to the Jews but also to those in Syria and beyond (Matt. 4: 24).

I state that the One, Who in a short period shone upon you with wonders and therefore making His Name known to all, would not have achieved less than that if He had

² Sermon on N.T.Lessons, 73:2.

performed miracles at an earlier age. Moreover, He would not have remained unknown all that time (until He became thirty years old). Had he not remained unknown, it would have appeared strange for a child to do miracles...

Actually, He did not do anything when He was a child other than one incident that St. Luke reports as a witness (Lk. 2:46). He was twelve years old when He sat and listened to the teachers and they were astonished by His questions. Other than that, it is more probable and logical that He did not begin to do miracles at an early age otherwise things would have appeared suspicious. Many doubted in Him when He was of a mature age; so how much more would that have been if He had performed miracles as a young boy? This would have expedited His crucifixion before the designated time, and through the poison of hatred the facts of God's Plan would not have been accepted¹.

St. John Chrysostom

' After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days' [12]

Origen² notes that the word '**Capernaum**' means ' field of action.' He says that the Lord and those with Him went to Capernaum but did not stay there for long. This is because those who are fallen or wavering do not have a place where the Lord and His saints could stay for many days. They represent the incline in the 'field of action' that has no potential to be receptive to much teaching, and is satisfied with very little movement. In contrast, souls that are spiritually sublime look upwards and enjoy the divine promise: "...lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" and are not satisfied with just a few days.

When we are crucified with the Lord, He lives with us and within us so that we can join the Apostle and say: "...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me..." (Gal. 2:20). In this way He abides, lives, and speaks with us to the end of time.

❖ After the joy provided by the wine, it was necessary for the Savior, together with His Mother and the disciples to enter 'the field of action' in order to motivate the disciples that fruit is found in a fertile field. It is the Holy Spirit that makes the soul pregnant and fruit bearing. Besides, they wanted to motivate those who were present and were willing to benefit³.

Origen the Scholar

What does the Evangelist mean when he uses the expression 'His brothers'? St. **Augustine** explains that it would include all those who have blood ties with St. Mary and therefore considered His brothers. St. Augustine supports this by quoting the Holy Bible: Lot, Abraham's nephew is called his brother (Genesis 13:8; 14:14); Laban, Jacob's uncle, was called his brother (Gen.29:12,15). Moreover, the Lord speaks about His disciples and calls them His brothers (Matt.12:46-50)⁴.

2- The Purification of the Temple

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21:2.*

² *Commentary on John, Book 10:41-42.*

³ *Commentary on John, Book 10:38*

⁴ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 10:2-3.*

‘ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.’[13]

This is the first Passover that occurs after the Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ. The second is mentioned in Luke 6:1; the third in John 6:4; and the fourth falls on the day the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified (Jn 11:55).

‘ And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business.’[14]

Origen wonders about the addition of ‘Jews’ to ‘ Passover’ ...is there another Passover that is celebrated besides the Passover of the Jews? He responds by saying that there were probably some who celebrated the Passover based on their own human understanding rather than following the Divine thought of the Holy Bible. That is why the Evangelist uses the expression ‘ **the Passover of the Jews.**’ In the Book of Exodus, the expression used is: ‘ **It is the Lord’s Passover**’(Ex.12:11). It does not say ‘ It is your Passover’ in any place. When God announces His rejection of the people, He associates the feasts and fasts to them and not to Himself, and says in Isaiah 1:14: “Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.”

❖ This is what happens when God’s people sin- they do not forget God. Similarly, God rejects feasts that are celebrated by sinners. Those that are set by the Lord are considered feasts of the Lord and the Passover is one of them. Although in the Gospel here, the wording indicates that the feast is not of Lord but of the Jews; yet in another part of the Holy Bible the Lord says the following : “The feasts of the Lord which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts” (Lev 23:2)¹.

Origen

Some thinkers believe that this incident occurred in the last week in the Life of the Lord on earth and that it helped to accelerate the events leading to His judgment and crucifixion. The leaders at the Temple considered the Lord’s act humiliating to them and to the holy building. However, St. John the evangelist puts this incident at the beginning of the Lord’s mission among the public in order to stress that He is the new Temple which replaces the old one. Besides, He is the unique Sacrifice that replaces the role of the bloody animal sacrifice. That is why the Lord chases the cattle and sheep with their sellers². Many scholars believe that the Lord purified the temple on two occasions: once during the first Passover which took place at the beginning of His service and as it is mentioned in St. John’s Gospel; and again a second time during the fourth and last Passover which was at the time of the Lord’s crucifixion (Matt 21:12; Mk 11:15;Lk 19:45). It is as though the cleaning of the House of God is the Lord’s first and last task: He begins His service at the Temple and ends it there too. The prophet Malachi had foretold that task (Mal.3:2-4).

The Lord Jesus Christ found that there was a market in one of the buildings of the temple known as the People’s House. There people to sell bulls, sheep, and pigeons which they would use for offering sacrifice. This place was close to the pool known as Bethesda (Jn 5:2) and the head priests and those with them therefore used it to get

¹ *Commentary on John, Book 10:80-81.*

² *El Khoury Paul Elfaghali: The Gospel of St. John, The Writing Syndicate, 1992, pg 15.*

material profit: in return for a certain fee they gave certificates stating that the sacrifice has no blemishes. That is how greed for money damaged the purity of worship (1 Tim. 6:5, 10). Besides, there were moneychangers who sold shekels of gold specifically indicated as offerings for the temple.

There is no doubt that the Lord had seen that sight before when He visited the temple. One instance was when He had gone to listen to the teachers and questioned them, but He was only thirteen years old at that time. But He only purified the temple when He began His ministry publicly. Besides, He did not complain or report about it to the head priests for He knew that they approved and encouraged what was going on.

The sellers of the sheep are those who transfer the salvation provided by the Lord, the Lamb of God, into a commercial business. They acquire a material possession at the expense of losing eternal salvation and seek that which is earthly rather than a heavenly reward.

❖ The Lord has justly said about such people: “ Many rulers have destroyed My vineyard, they have trodden My portion under foot, they have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness, they have made it desolate...” (Jer. 12:10). For truly the vineyard of the Lord has become corrupt for they have learned to crush divine worship. Through the greed of those appointed as guardians, the vine has been left barren and unfruitful for all the uninformed.

St. Cyril the Great

❖ Who are they who sell the sheep and the pigeons?

They are those who seek to satisfy themselves rather than serve the Lord. They are those who believe that all that matters is what sells and do not think of salvation. They do not ask to be bought but rather want to sell. Indeed, it would have been better for them to be saved by the Blood of the Lord and to possess His peace. Now however, what benefit do they get when they seek in this world a transient object? No matter what it is - be it money or pleasure of food, or honor that stems from people's praise - these are all certainly transient. Are not all these things as a cloud or steam? Do not all these pass away and vanish?...those who seek these things, my dear brothers, are only selling¹.

St. Augustine

St. Augustine considers that the bulls to refer to the apostles (I Cor 9:9-10). And that those who trade in bulls are like those who adhere to the apostle and not to his Friend (the Lord Jesus Christ). Therefore St. Paul reprimands the Corinthians and says: “...Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?...” (1Cor1:13); also “ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase,” (1 Cor 3:6-7). [May those who pray for the peace of His servants say: May the Lord be glorified!²]

Those who participate in the bull trade are those who engage in teaching the Word and they are like those who plough in the Lord's field. Yet they do so as they seek a transient benefit rather than the joy of the Fruit of the Spirit. St. Paul says that these “...preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely...” (Phil 1:16).

¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 10:6.*

² St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 10:7*

Those who sell the sheep are those who perform acts of mercy (woolen clothes and meat) in order to win human praise. They therefore receive their reward in this world (Matt 6:5).

Those who sell pigeons are those who misuse the gift of the Holy Spirit that appeared in the form of a dove. An example of this is the Simonist movement practiced in the ordination of priests: Simon wanted to buy with silver the power of the Holy Spirit. He then wanted to sell it and get material profit or temporary honor rather than receive the spiritual benefit (Acts 8: 19-20).

❖ The Lord does not allow those who are slaves to money as well as those who sell seats to enter His temple. For what do these seats represent but favors and honors? What are the pigeons other than the simple - minded and those souls that follow a clear faith? Has the Lord shut the door in the face of anyone that has been brought to His temple...yet those who sell honors and posts must necessarily be ordered to leave. It is vital to command the eviction of those who sell the simple- minded believers³.

St. Ambrose

❖ The cattle refer to transient matters since cattle are engaged in plowing the earth. The sheep symbolize unreasoning beastly matters as sheep are the most remote and unreasoning animals. Pigeons represent unsteady thoughts and their annulment ; while the coins represent what we think are good matters¹.

❖ It is necessary to tear away these beastly and commercial matters from the temple which is the Body of Christ so that it does not become a house of trade².

❖ It is also necessary that the temple be destroyed by those who devise plots against the Word of God; and that it would be back (risen) on the third day after its destruction...similarly, every person is purified when the Lord Jesus Christ tears and removes from him all manner of bestiality and commercial confusion. These are destroyed on account of the zeal of the Word within that person, and he will arise on the third day through the Lord...the temple is built on the first day following its destruction, and on the second day, and finally completed on the third when the resurrection is achieved. It will be a resurrection since having been buried with Christ, we arise with Him too (Rom. 6:4)³.

Origen

‘When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changer’s money and overturned the tables.’ [15]

It seems as though He did not chase the sellers or the moneychangers but only the cattle, sheep and pigeons. He overturned the money and the tables. He came not to

³ *Sermon Against Auxentius, 21.*

¹ *Commentary on St. John, Book 10:142.*

² *Commentary on St. John, Book 10:240.*

³ *Commentary on St. John, Book 10:243.*

judge but to purify and sanctify. He came to mend the corrupt. In His eyes, one soul is more precious than all these animals and gold and money.

❖ He reveals His feelings not only by words but by using cords. He chases them out with a whip from the holy places. He Justly applies the appropriate punishment for slaves for they have rejected the Son. It is He who grants freedom to man through faith.

❖ It is important that those who honor obedience to the law and proclaim the truth to realize that they deserve to submit to the stripes and sufferings of slavery when they revert to the spirit of slavery and reject to rejoice in freedom⁴.

❖ The rebellious Jews will be chased out of the holy places, and they will be ousted from the sanctified gathering of the saints. Even when they will present offerings, He will reject them. Moreover, He will subjugate them to punishment and the whip as they hold on to the cords of their sins (refer to Prov. 5:22).

St. Cyril the Great

‘And He said to those who sold doves: “ Take these away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!”[16]

The Lord went up to Jerusalem in order to purify His Father’s temple and which had become a house of trade. Now He constantly goes up to the inner Jerusalem, to our depths, to build within us a heavenly temple sanctified to the Father. He purifies it from all trading and corruption.

❖ He says: “ **Do not make My Father’s house a house of trade...**” and He does not say “ our Father’s house.” This is appropriate for according to these words...the Word is understood to be of the essence of God the Father. The Word is not one of those who are children by grace. Therefore He separates Himself from the rest and calls God His Father.**St. Cyril the Great**

❖ Yet do not keep our silence towards heretics who separate the Old from the New Testament. We believe the words of the Lord Jesus Christ concerning the temple: “ Did you not know that I must be in My Father’s house?¹” Also: “ Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise.” Here He affirms more clearly that the previous temple in Jerusalem is His Father’s house².

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ The Lord did not say: “ Do not make the holy house...” but He said: “ **Do not make My Father’s House....**” So here He calls God His Father. They were not angered because they believed Him to be using that expression in a simplistic way and did not understand these words except after He explained that He spoke these words to equate Himself with God. They then got angered against Him.

St. John Chrysostom

⁴ *Comm. On John, hom. 132.*

¹ *Luke 2:49: “ Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?!”*

² *Article 7: 6.*

‘ Then His disciples remembered that it is written: ‘ Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.’ [17]

The disciples began to comprehend what lay behind the acts of the Lord as they began to remember that what is written in the Holy Book. Indeed, within the Word of God every word explains the other and clarifies it. Now they remembered that which is written in Psalm 69:9.

❖ The zeal for the house of the Father- that is the Church- burned in the heart of the Lord for He loved Her and delivered Himself for Her sake. He did so in order to grant Her eternal life and fellowship in His glory.

❖ ‘ **Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up**’[17]...everyone of you knows what to do in your home, with friends in their homes, at work, with those who are greater or lesser than you; and as much as God allows you to enter, when He opens the door for His Word - that never ceases to win someone for the Lord - for you have been won yourself through the Lord Jesus Christ³.

St. Augustine

❖ The Lord Himself says: ‘ **Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up**’: May we have true zeal for the Lord. I do not mean an earthly kind of zeal as this arouses envy. For peace to exist among you, the kind that surpasses understanding, may you love one another. Nothing is sweeter than love, and nothing is more blessed than peace. You know that I love you always, and now I love you above all else and as children of one Father: for you have become unified by the bond of brotherly love⁴.

St. Ambrose

3 - Requesting a Miracle

3 - Requesting a Miracle

So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do you show to us, since You do these things?”[18]

When the Lord chased the sellers and purified the Temple He did so with such authority that the leaders could not display any resistance or opposition to Him before the public. They needed to underline their great respect and concern towards the Temple, as well as everything that happened there. So instead of admitting the corruption that had taken place as a result of the of trade transactions carried on within its walls, they asked Him: “**What sign do you show to us, since You do these things?**” Moreover, they were really hurt as they would lose their dishonest money as a result. By asking this question, they therefore hoped to prevent Him from interfering with their business

³ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 10:9.*

⁴ *Duties of the Clergy, Book 2:30:154.*

When Moses appeared to save the people of God from slavery, he performed clear miracles. So what are the miracles that Jesus did that would make them accept and acknowledge Him? The leaders could not comprehend how He could purify the Temple without meeting any opposition, and even though He was not vested with any human power or official religious status or divine weapon. Indeed, His Divine Presence dissolved all darkness.

❖ If that matter was hidden from the Jews, it was because they stood outside. As for ourselves, it has been revealed to us since we know in whom we should place our faith. Soon, we will celebrate the destruction of the Temple in an awesome annual celebration. We urge you to be prepared for that since you will receive grace as believers¹.

St. Augustine

❖ The Jewish leaders could not reprimand the Lord Jesus Christ...but they invented the means that would allow the dealers to escape. At the same time they found a way to excuse themselves for their unbelief and their inability to submit to Him immediately or unquestioningly. Therefore they could not receive Him as the Son of God if they were not given a miracle.

St. Cyril the Great

❖ Their utter insanity is so regrettable! Is there a need for a miracle before they could stop from their evil acts and liberate the House of God from such shameful transactions? Is not the greatest miracle evident in His jealousy towards that House? The disciples appropriately distinguished themselves as they remembered that it was written: **“Zeal for Your house has eaten me up,”** [17]. In contrast, the Jews did not remember this prophecy, and said: **“What sign do you show to us?”** They hoped that in this manner they would be able to stop Him and further embarrass Him so that He would perform a miracle. This would have given them the opportunity to find Him guilty².

St. John Chrysostom

“Jesus answered and said to them: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,”[19].

The miracle that the Lord Jesus Christ did is that He came to our earth as the all-powerful Divine Presence. He alone could break the lock of Hades and destroy death that is the last enemy of mankind. By this, He granted those who believe in Him the power of the resurrection. This is the last miracle the Lord Himself has performed by His resurrection and before His ascension into the heavens. It was necessary for Him to die yet corruption could not affect Him (Ps. 16:10).

He asked them to destroy the temple of His Body indicating that they would lift Him up on the Cross; whereas they understood that He was speaking about the temple made of stone.

¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 10:10.*

² *Homilies on St. John, Hom.23:2.*

❖ Those who have described Him as the free One have well-said for He has the power to raise Himself...furthermore He is free who descended in order to set others free¹.

St. Ambrose

‘ Then the Jews said: “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” [20].

The temple was built in forty-six years. Some believe that building began in the days of Herodus in the year 19/20 B.C. and so it was finished by the year 28 B.C. approximately. Others believe that Herodus the Great began rebuilding it in the eighteenth year of his reign² and ended the main work in nine and a half years. However, repairs and additions went on for many more years. Herodus began the work in the year 16 B.C. and the reference here is to the time the Lord was thirty years old. In this way the temple was forty six years old and it was not yet finished. This indicates that the reference made here is to the last temple because the first one had been completed in twenty years. It therefore becomes clear that the beginning of the Lord’s ministry coincided with the time the Jews experienced the peak of their pride in their newly achieved temple. Therefore it was not easy for them to accept the words of the Lord concerning destroying it in three days.

It took the same time to build the temple when Zerbabel laid the foundations of the temple from the second year in the reign of Koresh to its completion in the year 32 in the reign of Artaxerxes.

❖ They belittled the miracle as they did not comprehend the depth of the mystery. Indeed, they held on tenaciously as they suffered from the disease of ignorance. This is their excuse and self-vindication for disobeying Him...How could He be incapable of doing anything however hard while He is the One who has mightily created the whole world in six days; while to Him belongs transcendental and inexpressible power: He just has to will something and it gets powerfully fulfilled?

St. Cyril the Great

St. Augustine presents a symbolic interpretation to the **number 42**: The four letters for the name of Adam represent the first letters for the four global points: Anatole for the east, Dysis for the West, Arctos for the North, and Mesembria for the South. It is as though Adam has been fragmented and scattered in all directions in the world. These are the Greek letters for Adam and they are equivalent to the number 42, as the (A) or Alpha is equivalent to the number (1), Delta (D) to number (4), and May (M) to number (40). So ADAM is equal to 1+4+1+40= 46. This is the Temple or the Body that the Word has taken from Adam and which He destroyed in order to raise him in three days and grant him eternal joy. Man has been raised by the will of the Father, the power of the Son, and by the Holy Spirit Who is the Spirit of the Resurrection³. **‘But He was speaking of the temple of His body...’[21].**

They revealed their ignorance as they misinterpreted the Lord’s words. He was

¹ *On the Decease of His Brother Saytrus, Book 2:103*

² *Josephus: Antiq.b.15c.11 s.l.;b.20c.9s.5,7.*

³ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 10:12.*

referring to the temple of His body. Even so, would it have been beyond the Creator's power to build a stone temple in three days?

Just as the new Messianic wine replaced the Water of Purification used according to tradition, so the temple of the resurrected body of the Lord replaces the temple of the Old Testament and which the army of Titus the Roman destroyed in the year 70 A.D. The Lord Jesus Christ has established a new temple within us and no army in the world can ever destroy it (1 Cor 6:19).

This saying has been fulfilled by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection on the third day. Moreover, this continues to be fulfilled in the Church which is His Body; as well as within every believer who is a member in the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

❖ Some may say: What was the purpose of the Lord for not explaining His puzzling words since He was referring to the building of His body and not to the stone temple. Rather, He kept silent and did not explain, because He knew that they would still not accept His words. If even some His disciples did not fully understand and did not know how to interpret what had been said to them, then it was logical that the people and the crowds could not understand the meaning of His words.

St. John Chrysostom

'Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them;, and they believed the Scripture and the word which the Lord had said.'[22].

Many of the prophecies are hard to comprehend except after they have been fulfilled. Similarly, the disciples could not comprehend His words at that time for they were still like children in their concepts. When the Lord arose, He opened their mind so that they might understand the Scriptures. He also inflamed their hearts with the real understanding of the prophecies (Lk 24:45). Although their hearts were slow to believe yet they were fully convinced that His words are true.

❖ The Holy Spirit reminded the disciples of all what the Lord had told them previously. Indeed, they held onto the grace and talents granted to them, and displayed an enlightened existence, much wisdom, and plenty of conscientious work. They did not care at all for earthly blessings but transcended them so that they seemed like eagles in flight towards the heights. This was because they depended on the grace granted to them so that they reached the heavens themselves and ultimately possessed the grace of the Spirit.

St. John Chrysostom

'Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, when they saw the signs which He did.'[23]
But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men.'[24]

They believed that He was the awaited Messiah, but they did not comprehend that He was the Savior of the world. Rather, they imagined that He was the King of Israel who

would liberate them from being occupied and grant them a worldly power. They did not understand that He is the Savior of their spirits therefore their hearts were not changed and consequently the Lord did not place His trust in them.

Origen the Scholar makes a distinction between those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and those who believe in His name (only). The Lord did not commit Himself to those who believed in His name only but He trusted those who believed in Him.

❖ The disciples were truly profound in their faith. Unlike the others who were attracted to the Lord because of the miracles He performed, they believed because they were attracted by His teachings. Those who were drawn to Him on account of the miracles revealed a dense frame of mind, whereas those drawn by His teachings were more determined and steadfast so that the Lord called them ‘blessed’ and said: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Jn 20:19).

As for those mentioned in this passage, they were not real disciples. This is what the following expression reveals: ‘**But Jesus did not commit Himself to them...**’[24]. Why Not? ‘**Because He knew all men**’¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ It is appropriate that we adhere to Him more than our adherence to His name. When we do miracles through His name we do not wish to hear the words that have been said about those who take pride in His name only (Matt. 7: 22-23). Indeed, we should follow St. Paul’s example and have the courage to say: “ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13)¹.

Origen

❖ He did not entrust Himself to those who had newly accepted the faith...those who administer the sacraments of our Lord need to learn from this that they should not allow someone suddenly to enter into the holy sanctuary. Neither should they allow beginners, who have recently been baptized before being mature enough and have not come to the faith at the right time, to approach the divine altar.

❖ Just as God alone always sees our inner depths, so does our Lord Jesus Christ too. So how can He not be God by nature ?

St. Cyril the Great

The Lord Jesus Christ knows man for He is the Creator of all things (Jn 1:3), He is altogether wise () and the Discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb 4:12).

‘ **...and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.**’ [25].

¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 24:1.*

¹ *Commentary on St. John, Book 10:310.*

❖ Recognizing God is a characteristic of man's heart and it proceeds from Him who has created the hearts with perfection. Solomon, in wisdom, prayed to God saying: "...then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You only, only You, know the hearts of all the sons of men) (I Kgs. 8:39). That is why the Lord did not need witnesses in order to know the plan of His creation for He knew all their secrets.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The expression : ' **...for He knew what was in man**' could betaken to refer to the powers of good and evil that work within man. So if a person makes a place for Satan (Eph 4: 27) allows him to come in. This is what Judas did when he allowed Satan to have a place in his heart and so betrayed the Lord...a person becomes blessed when he/she gives God a place within; for ' Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage' (read Ps. 84:6). The Son of God who knows all things, knows what is within man².

Origen

² *Commentary on St. John, Book 10:321*

Inspirations drawn from The Gospel of John Chapter Two

Your Presence Transforms My Life into a Perpetual Wedding Celebration

❖ Your presence transforms my life into a constant wedding.
Your Presence brings with You Your Mother, Your disciples, and those who love
Come, the wedding is ready!
Come, no one other than You brings joy to my heart!

❖ You have transformed the water into new wine
Instead of the literal commands of tradition which burden my frame,
You have granted me the Gospel that gladdens my heart!
Let me get drunk with Your love and let me adore Your heavens,
Then the world will no more have no place within me!

❖ Grant me, through Your fiery Spirit, to listen more to that voice saying:
Whatever He says to you, do it!
My obedience to you makes her heart and the hearts of all those who love you to
rejoice.
Her prayers and intercession support me,
So I pray with an obedient spirit that I may observe Your commands.

❖ May You enter into my depths and consecrate them to be an altar for You:
May You chase away all the cattle and sheep from there,
Then there would not be any place for ugly profit within me.
May You grant me, through Your Holy Spirit,
To Possess the eyes of a humble dove.
May You remove all love for money from the table of my heart!

❖ Grant me the spirit of zeal for Your house,
Then my heart will be enflamed with inner purity rather than being preoccupied with
judging others.

❖ The Jews constructed the old temple in forty six years
And now You have resurrected the temple of Your Body from the grave in three days
In three days You have established Your Church as a heavenly Bride.
The darkness of the grave is no longer our place,
For we now live in the ultimate beauty of Your heavens!



CHAPTER 3

NICODEMUS AND THE NEW BIRTH

THE TEACHER AND GIVER OF THE NEW BIRTH!

None of the chapters of the New Testament is as difficult as chapter three in the Gospel according to St. John. In spite of that, it has attracted many unbelievers to convert into the Christian faith. Those who are serious in their search for salvation find themselves reading the words of this chapter and standing with Nicodemus seeking to hold a secret conversation with the Lord Jesus Christ. When they learn of the new possibilities granted to them, they worship the Lord and pray to be united with Him as they desire to enjoy His Holy Spirit, and get renewed and born a second time through baptism.

Within the same framework of teachings that assure a new Messianic life and together with the revelation of: a new wine and a new temple, it now becomes necessary to reveal the **new birth**.

So this is presented in the unique meeting between a Pharisee, who has a wonderful personality, and the Lord Jesus Christ who is the living spiritual Source that flows into every soul seriously concerned about salvation. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus was thoroughly versed in the Torah and Jewish traditions. Being a moral man, he believed that it is in man's power to obey willingly the righteous traditions. This, he believed depended upon personal struggle and human will, as well as adhering strictly and literally to the Law based on his own study and observation. He found that the Lord Jesus Christ was a Jewish Teacher deeply concerned with the Law. This is probably why the Evangelist mentions Nicodemus as one of those most attracted to the Lord. In this context, St. John says: 'Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did...' (Jn. 2:23), and Nicodemus believed that He came from God (Jn.3:2). He might have been hoping that the Lord was a social reformer who based His teachings on the literal interpretation of the Law and consequently improve the condition of the Jewish people.

The mentality and experience of Nicodemus did not qualify or help him to accept the new life in the Lord Jesus Christ. He could not comprehend the grace of a new birth and the benefits of a new spiritual Law. He needed the Lord to help him lift up his thoughts, heart, and all his senses and potentials towards heaven. Only by doing so, Nicodemus could come to comprehend his need for a new birth through the One who "came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven..." He alone ascends into heaven and carries all those who believe in Him to enjoy adoption through Him and be the children of God.

The meeting between Nicodemus and the Lord Jesus Christ draws our hearts to the Lord

Jesus Christ as we get to realize His concern over every human soul as well as His gentleness as He converses frankly with each one.

We have seen the Word coming and dwelling among us to make us children of God (Ch. 1), and now He proclaims the manner of the new birth in His conversation with Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. Nicodemus yearned to see the Kingdom so the Lord stressed that he needed to be baptized by the water and the Spirit. This is necessary as it enables the believer to live permanently as a child of God and live according to His Spirit. In the passage of this Chapter, the Lord lifts us up from the earthly concerns and makes us preoccupied with heavenly matters. He tells that we can do so through our union with the heavenly One who descended to raise us up with Him to the heavens where He reigns [13].

The Lord links Baptism with the Cross as the Father proclaims His love for all mankind by sending His Son so that the whole world may enjoy eternal life [16].

By indicating the new birth, the Lord leads us away from the fear of condemnation and into the enjoyment of the **Divine Light** [21].

When St. John the Baptist saw what happened at the time the Lord was baptized, and what this implied concerning the blessing of adoption to those who believe in Him, his joy was complete. He heard the voice of the Bridegroom engaging His Bride so that She may live in the glorious heavens with Him [29].

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1- A Discussion about the New Birth

‘There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews’ [1].

Nicodemus: This is a Jewish name that means ‘the conqueror of the people.’ He was a ruler of the Jews that is he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest council for the Jewish nation.

The Divine invitation is addressed to the whole human race including all classes. However, few of those who occupied leadership, religious, or temporary positions could respond to that invitation. Indeed, a minimal number from among the Pharisees, less than the fingers of one hand, responded to it and one of these was Nicodemus. He came to meet with the Lord alone or He might have been accompanied by one or more of His disciples. Yet the Lord did not belittle that one soul for He has suffered death on the Cross for the sake of each human soul.

The Pharisees truly displayed a hostile and rebellious spirit towards the Divine truth. However, there were some among the learned and scholars who yearned to meet with the Lord and they found His door opened. The grace of God works in scholars as well as in illiterate people, in the common man as well as in leaders, in the simple as well as in

the rebellious. Nicodemus came to the Lord yet his status remained to be among the rebellious; and he set his heart to act as much as he could and when the opportunity would come. And the time came when he could act while the disciples could not. Then he took permission from Pilate to bury the Body of the Lord in his new private tomb.

We are referring here to Nicodemus Ben Gorion mentioned in Jewish writings and said to be so wealthy that he could support all the people of Jerusalem for many decades. Yet some find some exaggeration in this report.

‘ This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him: “ Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him” [2].

Every time St. John the Evangelist mentions the person of Nicodemus, he presents him in connection with his visit to the Lord at night. This is repeated three times in this Gospel: (3:2; 7:50; 19:39). **Why did he come to the Lord at night?**

A- Because hearing the Lord’s public talks were not enough for him. Moreover, he did not enjoy seeing the miracles the Lord did openly. He actually felt that he needed to sit quietly and talk with the Lord about matters related to the salvation of his soul. He wanted to have a personal conversation with Him (Malachi 2:7). Even the Son of Man often withdrew from the crowds and His own disciples as He felt the need to spend the whole night carrying a most enjoyable conversation with the Father. How much more does each one of us need to abandon everything and sit, especially at night, with His Lord, and to engage in a personal conversation with Him, and so experience the new life and fellowship with Him?

B- It could be a choice based on wisdom since he knew the Lord was busy all day serving the people. Therefore Nicodemus waited until night time in order to meet with the Lord and have a friendly conversation during His time of repose.

C- It could be that he seized the first chance to meet personally with the Lord after he had seen some amazing miracles. When everyone would be asleep, he wanted to spend a spiritual evening with the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides he might have been worried that he would not get such a chance in the future. He was an opportunist! He seems to have followed David’s example as he seized night time as an opportunity for meditation (Ps 36:6; 119:148).

D-There is a possibility that what motivated him to go at night was his fear that this would be reported to the chief priests. It would increase their anger against the Lord Jesus Christ. It might also drive them, as well as the other rulers and Pharisees, to hurt Nicodemus himself. It could be that he lacked the light of faith for even though he was attracted to the Lord as a person, yet he had not yet become well acquainted with Him. Moreover, He had not become aware of the reality of His being the Light of the world. Nicodemus was a Jewish ruler [1], a teacher of Israel [10] and he needed a new birth in order to enjoy the new implications of a Messianic and heavenly kingdom. He came at night with a faith that was weak and he found the door of the Lord’s heart opened. The Lord did not hurt his feelings with any reproach. All things considered, his faith was like a mustard seed that grew and became a great tree by the time the Lord was crucified. Therefore he courageously went to ask for the body of the Lord.

❖ Nicodemus met with the Lord yet in a manner and that was not appropriate or distinguished. He still suffered from a certain Jewish weakness. That is why he came to the Lord at night as he feared visiting Him in the day time. In spite of that the merciful God did not reject or reproach him. Neither did He deprive him of His teachings. On the contrary, the Lord talked with him very tenderly, and revealed to him sublime teachings. These were surely vague or unknown to Nicodemus but the Lord clarified them to him. He deserved to be excused when compared with others who behave in the same way but with evil intentions. Such people have no excuse whatsoever, whereas Nicodemus could be condemned to a lesser degree⁸.

❖ Although Nicodemus was different, yet he regarded the Lord in a human manner. He spoke about Him as a prophet and pronounced Him to be great due to His miracles, so he says: “Rabbi, **we know that You are a teacher come from God...**” [2]. So why did you come secretly at night to the One who speaks the things of God and who has come from Him? Why did you not discuss things with Him openly? The Lord Jesus Christ did not ask Nicodemus any such questions and did not even rebuke Him, for the prophet says: “A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench” (Is. 42:3, Matt. 12:19,20). The Lord Himself once said: “I did not come to judge the world but to save the world” (Jn. 12:47)⁹.

“...for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him “[2]”

Note the ever-increasing humility of the Lord Jesus Christ. He abstained from saying: ‘I do not need help from others for I have the power to do all things as I am the Son of God Himself and I possess the power of My Father.’ That would have been hard on His hearers...

Consequently the Lord seemed to put constraints upon Himself in many instances. However, He did not do the same thing concerning His actions. So when He made a miracle He did it with authority, and therefore says: “I am willing; be cleansed” (Matt.8:3); “Talitha, cumi” (Mk 5:41); “Stretch out your hand” (Mk3:5); “Your sins are forgiven” (Matt.9:2); “Peace be still!” (Mk 4:39); “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house” (Matt 9:6); “Come out of the man, unclean spirit!” (Mk 5:8), “And if anyone says to you: ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘the Lord has need of it.’ (Mk 11:3); “...today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Mk 23:43)... “You have heard that it was said to those of old, “ You shall not murder...but I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment (Matt 5:21,22). “ Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt 1:17). In every situation we notice His great authority so that as He works no one can find any fault or mistake in Him...however, through His speeches they could, in their own insanity, accuse Him of insanity.

That is why, in the case of Nicodemus, the Lord did speak openly. Rather, He led him with ambiguous words that indicate that He possesses an intrinsic authority to do miracles. This was because He was born of the Father as perfect and fully sufficient with

⁸ *Homilies on St. John, 24:1.*

⁹ *Homilies on St. John, 24:2.*

not a single shortfall¹⁰.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Nicodemus was one of those who (believed in His name yet He did not commit Himself to them [2:23-24]. Nicodemus came to the Lord, but he came at night. He came in the darkness even though he came to the Light¹¹.

❖ Although Nicodemus came to the Lord, yet he came at night and he continued to think and speak through the darkness of his soul. Therefore he could not understand what he heard from the Light that shines to every person living in the world¹².

❖ Nicodemus was accustomed to being a teacher and this is probably the problem underlying the fact that he came to the real Lord at night. Now that he had to learn made him feel embarrassed. Personally, my greatest joy is to listen to a teacher rather than having people listen to me as a teacher. For I remember the Lord's words to those whom He had chosen at first: "But you, do not be called Rabbi: for One is your Teacher, the Christ..." (read Mattt.23:8)¹³.

St. Augustine

In any case, Nicodemus did not come at night to be baptized. Neither did he come to learn and be the Lord's disciple or student. According to Jewish tradition, one cannot enter the Jewish faith or be circumcised or baptized at night. That would be unlawful. He just came to be informed of the Lord's views and to be acquainted with His path but not to sit at His feet and be a learner.

'Rabbi': It was not easy for a Pharisee who is considered a scholar in the Holy Book and a leader of the people to submit to someone and speak humbly saying: "**Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God**" [2]. Nicodemus discussed neither politics nor matters concerning the country although he was a leader of the Jews. He was only concerned about the salvation of his soul.

Nicodemus admitted that the Lord had neither been taught by a Jewish scholar nor had attended a religious school; but that His teachings had been inspired by the divine and heavenly Power. He realized that the Lord carried the power of truth and not the power of the sword, and that He acted with an ultimate wisdom that transcends human wisdom. He acknowledges that the miracles the Lord did could were brought about by divine Power.

The astonishing thing is that he uses the plural '**we know.**' It could be that he came with another person or more of his students, or that he came to speak on behalf of some Pharisees who had no other preoccupation except 'Jesus.' Among themselves they had admitted what Nicodemus confesses in this passage. However, none of them dared to speak openly or to meet with the Lord secretly.

Jesus answered and said to him: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born (again), he cannot see the kingdom of God" [3]

¹⁰ *Homilies on St. John, 24:2.*

¹¹ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 11:4.*

¹² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 11:5.*

¹³ *Letters, 166:9.*

Nicodemus considered the act of doing miracles to be a proof that the Lord Jesus Christ came from God since all Rabbi associated piety with working miracle. He could not cross these limited concepts in order to comprehend the reality of the person of Jesus. Therefore he saw Him as a virtuous teacher and a man of God who enjoyed having the Divine One living with and in him always, just like Isaac to whom God said: "...do not fear, for I am with you..." (Gen.26:24); and like God said to Joshua, the son of Nun, "...as I was with Moses, so I will be with you..." (Joshua 1:5). Many other fathers and prophets had lived with the same experienced; but Nicodemus in spite of his piety had a certain set of mind that prevented him from stepping outside the limitations of the Pharisees. This is what he had learned, and this was how he lived within the Jewish environment.

The conversation between the Lord Jesus Christ and Nicodemus emphasizes the following points:

A- The desperate need for a new birth that would grant a vision of a new inner world, i.e. **'the kingdom of God.'** This is correctly called a new or second birth. This expression has been used by various translators writing in Coptic Syrian, and Latin; as well as many fathers of the First Church such as **St. Justin, St. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, St. Augustine and St. Jerome.** Nicodemus understood that the words of the Lord were an invitation to a 'new birth', and this baffled and crippled. How could a fully grown adult enter into his mother's womb and be born again?

B- The new **birth comes from above**, meaning that it is heavenly [3]. It is an act that is done exclusively by the holy and heavenly Spirit of God. By it He grants heavenly potentials that surpass human thought.

C- The new birth is achieved through baptism by **water and the Spirit** [5].

D- It is a birth that possesses **surpassing power and so it is likened to the wind**, so that no one knows its mystery [8].

In Jewish writings, the repetition of the word **'truth'** was considered synonymous with an oath that was deeply holy. The Lord Jesus Christ used it whenever He wished to indicate that a matter is extremely significant and serious.

The Lord Jesus Christ gently reprimands Nicodemus and reveals to him that it is not enough for a person to believe that Jesus Christ is a divine teacher; neither is it enough to admire His miracles and consider them real and unique. Indeed, what is needed is a birth from **'above' that** is a heavenly birth that would allow him to see heavenly matters. A fetus in its mother's womb can neither see the world nor have any experience in it unless it is born and comes out of its mother's body. In the same way, a person can neither see the kingdom of God nor experience the blessings of heaven unless he is born again from above. Only then will it be possible for him to see the Light of the new world and live within it.

By using the verb to **'see'** the Lord stresses that it is appropriate for a real believer, who enjoys the new heavenly birth, not to boast about that birth unless **he sees the kingdom of God within him and lives accordingly.** This means that he needs to achieve a

heavenly state of mind, follow principles consistent with the heavenly law, and to have new goals, new hope, and new potentials.

With the new birth, a believer starts a totally new life that is not established on correcting or reforming a person's being; but rather on demolishing the old and constructing a new building. It involves the elimination of the old person and the resurrection of the new person who is made in the image of his Creator.

The first time we were born sin corrupted our nature and formed our depths according to its ways so that we became corporal and dominated by the law of carnal desires and ruled by the enemy of goodness. Therefore a new birth became an unavoidable and vital necessity. That explains the Lord's words: **"Most assuredly, I say to you...."**

What is the kingdom of God and that we should always see other than the kingdom of the heavenly Messiah? He lives and establishes His kingdom within us; and we see, live, and share features with Him. Therefore we become holy as He is holy. This is the kingdom of God that dwells in us and within our reach and as the Lord Himself proclaims: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17); and also "...the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt 12:28). He assures us by saying: "...the kingdom of heaven is within you" (Lk17:21). Concerning our status in that kingdom, the Lord "...has made us kings and priests to His God and Father..." (Rev 1:6, 9; 5:10). This kingdom marks us with the features of our Lord Jesus Christ as we enjoy fellowship with Him "...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

This kingdom is the promise and warranty for an eternal kingdom. It will transport us to heaven and make us eager to share the amazing glory when the Lord will come. Moreover, it lifts our thoughts and focuses our inner vision towards the final day when the Lord will come and we will enjoy the heavenly crowns.

❖ It is possible to rephrase the Lord's words as follows: 'If you are not born again and if you do not receive fellowship with the Spirit within the baptismal font of renewal then you cannot possess the right thoughts concerning Me. This is because your concept about my body is not spiritual (Titus 3:5) ...the word 'again' (or from above) is interpreted by some to mean 'from heaven' while others find it to convey the meaning of 'from the beginning.' The Lord explains that a person not born in this way can possibly see the kingdom of heaven. Here the Lord is pointing to Himself (the Messiah) and proclaims that we need other eyes besides our normal eyes in order to see the Lord Jesus Christ¹⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

Nicodemus answered: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" [4].

The inquiry of Nicodemus reveals the weakness of his knowledge. While the Lord speaks spiritually, the heart of Nicodemus relates to material matters. He had to get rid of all ties with materialism from his heart and mind; otherwise it would be impossible for him to comprehend the heavenly birth that is from above. Only then would he

¹⁴ *Homilies on St. John, 24:2*

comprehend through the Spirit of God the new spiritual potentials.

Nicodemus was shocked by the Lord's words about the new birth. Like all other Jews, he took pride in his lineage from Abraham his father. They all felt they were God's chosen people and that they were blessed by the prophets and the divine promises. Moreover, God had made a covenant with them and they had the unique temple with all the rites associated with it. So Nicodemus is not only an Israelite but a Pharisee as well. What better birth could the Lord wish to give him? The Jews expected that when the Messiah would come, the nations would accept the faith and be born again, but as for them this did not apply. For they felt there could be no other birth more honorable for them than their current status. They boasted of their lineage and birth and it was impossible for them to hear of another birth.

In spite of all that, Nicodemus did not turn his back on the Lord. He hoped he could learn of something new that was lacking in his knowledge. He revealed that he, who was a teacher and leader, was humble and ready to receive any truthful information or divine revelation that he lacked. Yet this seemed an impossibility according to his own concepts. An amazing person! In spite of his long experience for many years, his position as a revered leader, and the environment created by the Pharisees around him, he bowed down to receive a new teaching. This is a formidable example for every true leader: not to boast of all his learning but to remain a learner until his last breath. **St. Ambrose, the Bishop**, says in this context, that God is the only One who does not need to learn.

❖ Nicodemus came to the Lord Jesus Christ as though he were coming to an ordinary person. He then heard of sublime matters that could not come from any person. Indeed, and no one else had ever heard of them. In moments, Nicodemus tried to rise quickly to such heights but his understanding was darkened. He became unsteady and failed in his faith constantly as he leaned on his own potentials. As a result, he insisted on confirming the impossibility of the Lord's words. It is as though he challenged the Lord to clarify His teaching by saying to Him: **“Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?”**... Nicodemus had heard about spiritual birth but had not experienced it spiritually. Indeed, he had given these words an utterly low and physical significance. Indeed, he depended on physical evidence to interpret such great teaching. By doing so, Nicodemus created petty and unpleasant obstacles. In this context, St. Paul comments: “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God...” (1 Cor.2:14). In spite of all that, Nicodemus observed respect and courtesy and did not scorn what the Lord said to him. Yet he kept silent as he believed this was an impossibility. He doubted in two matters: the kind of birth this could be, and the kingdom. The Jews had never heard mention of the kingdom at any time, neither had they heard of any such birth. Yet he stood there thinking about the first matter which involves a birth from above and which greatly astonished him¹⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ This man knew about the birth from Adam and Eve, but he did not know about the birth that is from God and the Church. He only knew of the parents who give a birth subjected to death, but he was ignorant of those who give a birth with a promise to life. He knew of parents who give birth to have heirs for themselves, but he was ignorant of immortal parents who granted a birth to those they could constantly revive. There are

¹⁵ *Homilies on St. John, 24:3.*

two births: one that is enacted on earth, and the other is enacted in heaven: one proceeds from the flesh, and the other from the Spirit; one that is susceptible to death, and the other is eternal; one proceeds from a male and female, and the other from God and the Church. As for Nicodemus, he could comprehend one birth only¹⁶.

❖ Just as there can be no repetition of the birth from the womb, so there can be none other from Baptism¹⁷.

St. Augustine

“Jesus answered: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” [5].

The Lord repeats again what He had said earlier in order to proclaim that this truth cannot be overlooked or taken lightly. Indeed, the word of God requires a response that is more than a mere yes or no: it requires a ‘Yes, Amen’ response. The Lord insists on the need for a new birth in spite of the inability of Nicodemus to comprehend it. For there is no other way to **see and enter** the kingdom of God except by going through a second birth.

Why is water used? To indicate the act of washing the spirit internally (Titus3:5; 1 Cor.6:11; Ezekiel 36:25). This cleansing is achieved by the Holy Spirit for He alone can wash, purify, and renew the inner depths. Just as the Lord turned the water into wine and granted joy to the wedding and to all the guests there, so the Lord offers us the water in order to purify our depths through the Spirit- and not for just cleaning our outward body. This is the water that the Lord promised as He spoke to the Samaritan woman and said that anyone who drinks of it shall never be thirsty. It is not like the water found in Jacob’s well and out of which he and his children and cattle drank. Indeed, the Lord offers living water.

Water is essential in the new birth since baptism is carried out through immersion. This is a sign of accepting death and burial with the Lord Jesus Christ in order to enjoy the new and resurrected life. Accordingly St. Paul says: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore 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). Consequently, the birth through water and the Spirit involves a death to physical life and the burial of the actions of the old man while accepting fellowship with the Lord in His resurrected life. It is the acceptance of a new life created by the Holy Spirit Who is the Spirit of the resurrection. It is a process that involves the creation of a new inner man and that leads us to die to all corruption in order to bear a new nature born in the image and likeness of the Creator.

❖ Now even the new comers who believe in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and carry His sign can neither receive absolution nor the gift of spiritual grace, unless they become baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit¹⁸.

¹⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 11:6*

¹⁷ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 11:6*.

¹⁸ *On the Mysteries, 4:20*.

St. Ambrose

❖ They can finally be completely sanctified and become children of God if they are born through the mystery and according to what is written: **“unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”¹⁹**.

St. Cyprian, the Martyr

❖ If you were to ask: ‘What is the meaning of the Lord’s words to Nicodemus? I would answer: ‘The Lord wished to draw him away from thinking in terms of a birth through the flesh.’ It is as though the Lord is telling him: ‘Nicodemus, I am speaking about another birth so why are you drawing My words to an earthly level? Why do you submit that act as being necessarily governed by nature? This birth is ultimately higher than the pains of labor imposed by natural law. Withdraw your soul from all that is general and common, for I enter into a world that holds another kind of birth and I desire people to be born again through another manner. I have come to bring a new method of being created. I have created man from the earth and water. However, what was formed turned out to be useless for the vessel has deviated from its purpose. Therefore I will not repeat forming it of dust and water, but rather will shape it by water and the Spirit.

If someone asked: **‘How does God create man from water?’** I will ask: ‘And how has He created man from earth? And how can you split mud in different parts? From where have the bones, nerves, veins and arteries been formed? From where have the skin, blood, liver, and bile been made? Out of where have His great works been accomplished...and the variety of colors...all these elements are neither part of the earth nor of the mud.

Furthermore, when the earth receives the seeds, how do they take root, whereas if they were placed in our bodies they would rot?

How does the earth feed the seeds, which in turn give fruit? Then how does our body get nourished by these seeds? The earth receives the water and turns it into wine; whereas our bodies receive wine and turn it into water. I am unable to verify mentally that these varieties are the product of the earth since the earth amazes our bodies with all its products. It is only my faith and belief in God that lead me to accept that these are the product of the earth.

Now, if all these varieties that are tangible as they take shape each day require belief and faith, then spiritual matters will occupy an adequate priority and demand belief and faith. And just as the immobile earth responds to the will of God and all these numerous wonders were formed out of it; similarly, **extreme and multiple wonders, far beyond our comprehension, occur when the Holy Spirit is present in the water ...**

If someone were to ask: ‘Why is water needed in this birth?’ My answer would be: ‘This birth acts and achieves a Divine significance: a grave, burial, faith, life, and resurrection. These all take shape within the act of baptism. For as our head is immersed in the water, it is as though we immerse them in the grave where we bury entirely the old man and drown him down below. Then, as we lift our heads the new man comes out as well.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Who is he who is born of the Spirit and becomes a spirit other than the one who becomes renewed in his mind through the Spirit (Eph. 4:23). This is certainly the person who is born again by the water and the Holy Spirit: it is the result of having received the

¹⁹ Letter 72 to Stephen: 1.

hope in eternal life through the font of the new birth and of being renewed through the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). In another passage, St. Peter the apostle says: "...you shall be baptized by the Holy Spirit" (Acts 11:16). Therefore, who is the one who is baptized by the Holy Spirit other than he who is born again with water and the Spirit? That explains the Lord's word's concerning the Holy Spirit: **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"**²⁰.

St. Ambrose

❖ The Book of the Acts of the Apostles speaks about the proclamation of the Holy Spirit Who lives in a baptized person. The water prepares the way for those who come and are sincere in their request. Baptism is called 'the washing of regeneration' (Titus3:5) that is achieved through the renewing of the Holy Spirit²¹.

❖ The corruption of sin is removed through the mystery of Baptism. That is why even babies are baptized. for **"...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"** (Jn. 3:5)²².

Origen

❖ Baptism washes all our faults away. It makes us become the holy temple of God and restores to us fellowship with the divine nature through the Holy Spirit²³.

St. Clement of Alexandria

❖ Through the holy baptism man is liberated from the power of Satan and becomes a spotless child in the likeness of Christ in the flesh. This is due to the work of the Holy Spirit that sanctifies and resurrects the baptized person as a spotless being. Therefore Satan can not have any power over him/her since the Spirit of the Lord is within²⁴.

Fr Sawiris, Bishop of Ashmonin

❖ When a person receives the Lord in baptism, he actually puts on or wears the Lord Jesus Christ besides being born of God (Gal.3:27). We do not understand this in a literary sense and as though it were the expression of love. Rather, we consider this reflects the truth since the incarnation has made our union with the Lord Jesus Christ and our fellowship in His divinity an actual fact and reality²⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

St. Jerome²⁶ associates poisonous snakes and scorpions with thirst when there is no water. He refers to this in his letter to Oceanus, a Roman noble and fervent believer. St. Jerome writes in this message about the blessings granted by the water and baptism and

²⁰ *On the Holy Spirit, Book 3:10:64.*

²¹ *Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty: The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Origen. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Boutros*

²² *Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty: The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Origen. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Boutros*

²³ *In Lucam 22:8.*

²⁴ *Precious Gems in interpreting the Scriptures, 1952, pg.121.*

²⁵ *The Author: God is my Sanctity, pg.52.*

²⁶ *St. Jerome: Letter 65:6.*

says:

- ❖ In the beginning and during the creation, the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters like a ship commander (Gen.1:2). He brought out of it a small world- a symbol of the Christian child who is immersed in the baptismal waters.
- ❖ The word heaven in the Hebrew language 'Shamyim' means 'the one coming out of the water.'
- ❖ The living creatures that Ezekial the prophet saw in his vision had the heavens stretched out over their heads, 'the color of awesome crystal' (Ez.1:27), and he heard 'the noise of many waters.'
- ❖ In the Garden of Eden there was a river with four sources that watered the Paradise (Gen. 2:1).
- ❖ In the vision of Ezekial of the new house of the Lord, he saw the waters flow out of the threshold towards the East. Water heals and grants life to dead souls (Ez.47:1-9).
- ❖ When the world committed sin it was impossible to purify it by any means other than through a flood. Then when the unclean bird flew out, the dove of the Holy Spirit returned to Noah. After that, it came to the Lord Jesus Christ at the Jordan River. It held in its beak the branch proclaiming peace to the whole world.
- ❖ Pharaoh and his army drowned in the Red Sea as they refused to allow the people of God to leave Egypt. Consequently, the water has become a symbol of our baptism. The fate of Pharaoh is described in the Psalms: 'You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters, You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces' (Ps.74:13; LXX 14).
- ❖ Moreover, the wood turned the bitter waters of Marah into sweet waters and so it could water seventy palm trees. In the same manner, the Cross has turned the waters of the Law into a source of life to the seventy apostles of the Lord (Ex.15:23-27; Lk.10:1).
- ❖ Abraham and Isaac dug wells while the Philistines attempted to prevent them (Gen.26:15, 18).
- ❖ Both Beersheba, the city of the oath (Gen.21:31); and Gihon, the city where Solomon was crowned as king, carried names that belonged to sources of water (1 Kgs 1:38; 2Chron.32:30).
- ❖ Abraham's servant found Rebekah near a well (Gen.24:15, 16).
- ❖ When Rachel went to draw water from the well, Jacob met and kissed her there (Gen.29:11).
- ❖ As the daughters of the priest of Midian were on their way to the well they were stopped by the shepherds. However, Moses helped and saved them (Ex.2:16, 17).
- ❖ The forerunner of the Lord- John the Baptist- at Salim (or Peace) prepared the people to receive the Lord by using a source of water (Jn.3:23).
- ❖ The Lord Himself did not begin to preach except after He had purified the Jordan through His baptism and immersion in it (Matt.3:13, 14).
- ❖ The Lord told Nicodemus privately that: "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn.3:5).
- ❖ Just as the Lord's ministry began with water, it ended with it as His side was struck with a sword and water and blood flowed out. These are two symbols for baptism and martyrdom (Jn 19:34).
- ❖ After His resurrection, when the Lord sent His disciples to the nations, He commanded them to baptize the people in the sacrament of the Holy Trinity (Matt. 28:19).
- ❖ When the Jews repented for their sins, St. Peter sent them to be baptized (Acts 2:38).
- ❖ Paul the persecutor of the Church, the roaring wolf coming from Benjamin (Gen.49:27) bowed his head before Ananias- one of the Lord's fold- and his sight was

restored only when he accepted the medicine of baptism (Acts 9:17, 18).

❖ Through reading the Book of Isaiah the Prophet, the eunuch of Candace became ready to receive the baptism of the Lord (Acts 8:27,38).

❖ The voice of the Lord is over the waters...the Lord is over many waters... (Ps.29:3, 10). 'Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep which have come up from the washing, everyone of which bears twins and none is barren among them' (Sg of Sol. 4:2).

❖ Micah refers to the grace granted by baptism as he says: "He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19).

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" [6].

This verse underlines the mystery or sacrament of baptism. Through baptism, we have been granted adoption. Hence, we have become sons of God and rightful heirs to His kingdom (Rom.8:15). Through this sacrament we are torn away from the wild olive tree and grafted into the new one (Rom.11:24) by the power of the Holy Spirit. Being baptized we put on the new 'robe' (Lk.15:22) and the 'wedding garment' (Matt.22:11-23) without which no one can enjoy the kingdom. The prophecy of Ezekial is fulfilled in this manner as he says: 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you, I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you....'(Ez.36:26).

When Nicodemus expressed his desire to comprehend what appeared impossible to him, the Lord revealed to him the meaning of a new birth: it did not involve a physical birth achieved by re-entering into the mother's womb. Rather, it meant a spiritual birth achieved by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Through His Spirit sanctification of the spirit is fulfilled (1Peter1:2); and inner washing of the soul by the Spirit is completed (Titus 3:5).

We are flesh not only because of this physical component but also in the sense that our bodies have become corrupted (Gen.3:5). Since our souls become one with the body, the soul consequently becomes enslaved to the dictates of the lustful body. It finds pleasure in immorality to the extent that man seems to have become wholly flesh. Now how can union be achieved between that which is wholly flesh and God Who is a Spirit? This is what demanded a new birth so that the entire human being might carry the feature of the Spirit. Consequently, the flesh would find its pleasure and joy in the Spirit rather than in the lusts of the flesh.

This is the natural cure for the human being who has been corrupted by the lusts of the body. It is a cure that the Son of God offers for He is the great Benefactor and Lawgiver. He is the Mediator of the New Testament and the Physician of our souls...He alone knows the real therapy.

He is the divine Vinedresser who knows that every tree brings fruit according to its seed. Therefore a person born of the Spirit will carry a spiritual and holy kingdom appropriate for God.

❖ Water is used to give birth to the new born. It plays the same role that a womb plays for a fetus. In the same manner, water is vital for a believer for in the water the believer gets formed and takes shape. At the beginning of the Creation, God said: "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures..." (Gen1:20). However, since the Lord entered the River Jordan, the waters produce reasoning souls that bear the Spirit rather than mere 'living creatures.' The baptized person is 'as a bridegroom coming out of his

chamber' (Ps.19:5). We are now speaking about the believers as they are clothed by Him in greater glory (than those born of the flesh). When a person is formed in the womb some time is needed. This is not the case when it comes to water for everything happens in one moment. In the first case, our life is susceptible to death and originates in the corruption of other flesh so that birth occurs slowly. This is not so in spiritual matters. Why? Because in the water things are wholly shaped from the beginning.

❖ When Nicodemus heard the Lord's words, he was disturbed. Notice how the Lord gradually opened before him the hidden matters of this mystery. Things that seemed vague a few moments earlier became clearer. He said: **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” [6]**. He led Nicodemus away from everything that is tangible and did not allow him to examine the revealed mystery erroneously through his physical sight. It is as though the Lord is telling him: ‘We are not speaking about the flesh, but about the spirit, O Nicodemus; (and with these words He led him towards heavenly matters for a while); so do not ask for things related to the flesh for the Spirit will never be revealed to its eyes. Moreover, do not imagine that the spirit can produce a physical offspring. Someone may ask: Then how was the body of the Lord Jesus Christ produced? It was not the work of the spirit alone for the body was involved as well, and St. Paul confirms that in his words: “...of a woman, born under the law...” (Gal.4:4). It is true that the spirit formed Him but this was not out of a void (otherwise why was a womb needed then?). However, He was shaped from a chaste body...

“...that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” implies that ‘the one born out of the Spiritual is spiritual’; since the birth that the Lord is speaking about in this context is relevant according to honor and grace and not according to the essence of the being²⁷.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ That which is powerful will definitely dominate that which is weak. Therefore the power of the spirit will devour the weakness of the flesh. In such a case, that person is no more a mere physical vessel for he/she has become spiritual due to the fellowship with the Spirit.

That is how martyrs represent a testimony of despite to death. They do so not depending on the weakness of the flesh but strengthened by spiritual preparedness. This is what devours the weakness of the flesh; and so making room for the power of the Spirit to shine.

In turn the Spirit, by absorbing the weakness of the flesh, reigns over it as a rightful inheritance. Through these two measures the living person is formed: being alive due to fellowship with the Spirit, yet being a human being due to the physical element of the flesh²⁸.

St. Irenaeus

**“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’ [7].
The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” [8].**

²⁷ *Homilies on St. John, 26:1.*

²⁸ *Adv. Haer.5:9:2.*

Man has no authority over the wind which blows and which we feel, yet we neither know its exact source nor where it will end. This is similar to birth by the Spirit which possesses power and influence. It is a free gift granted by God: He directs the Spirit Who in turn fulfills His word (Ps.148:8). Clearly we have no authority over the Spirit.

The action of the Spirit in Baptism is like that of a strong wind whose force is evident in its effect and the traces it leaves as a result. The Spirit works secretly and mysteriously yet its influence is clear in the life of the believer who experiences His presence each day.....GA.???

❖ When the Lord spoke to His disciples about the temple, He said: “Arise and let us depart from here....” He also told the Jews: “See! Your house is left to you desolate“(Matt.23:38). If heaven and earth will pass away (Lk.21:33), then, clearly, all earthly things will definitely pass away as well²⁹.

St. Jerome

❖ By saying: “Do not marvel...”, the Lord reveals the troubled state of Nicodemus. He leads him to something easier to understand. Indeed, the Lord moves away from all that relates to the flesh when He says: “...**that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**” As Nicodemus could not comprehend that which is born of the Spirit though He is a spirit, the Lord presents to him another example. He does not speak of things that possess physical density nor are they totally free from physical aspects (otherwise, on hearing of them, he would not have accepted His words). Rather, the Lord spoke of something that was in between things which possess a body and those which have none: the movement of the wind, and He says: “**The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit**” [8]. By saying that the wind blows where it wishes, the Lord is not implying that the wind had the power of making a choice. He is only indicating that it is impossible to resist its natural power. With that same power...it spreads all over and no one can oppose or deter its path in any way. Indeed, it blows with great power and no one can stand before its violence, and “**you hear the sound of it**” [8]. That is, you hear its murmuring and its noise **but cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit**” [8]. This is the ultimate conclusion of every matter. The Lord is asking why, if you cannot explain the movement of the wind and its course and this is something you comprehend through your sense of touch and hearing, then why are you so troubled by the work of the divine Spirit? Your inability to comprehend that is similar to your inability to understand the wind even though you hear its sound?!³⁰

St. John Chrysostom

Nicodemus answered and said to Him: “How can these things be?” [9].

The teacher of the Jews is agitated and asks: “**How can these things be?**” With his materialistic capacity he was unable to comprehend spiritual matters as they are inconceivable to the ordinary man. Nicodemus was unable to understand divine matters by depending on human wisdom. The Lord clarified sufficiently that this new birth is a

²⁹ Letter 58:2.

³⁰ Homilies on St. John 26:1.

spiritual and divine one and that it submits entirely to the Holy Spirit of God. It neither obeys the laws of nature or of sheer human logic. The new birth is solely authorized and directed by the Almighty God.

Jesus answered and said to him: “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?” [10].

It is as though the Lord is reprimanding him and saying: 'How have you taken the responsibility to lead the blind to the truth while you yourself are ignorant? You call upon the Jews who accept Judaism to be baptized with water as a symbol of the new birth and you yourself have not enjoyed it or even recognized it?' Has Nicodemus not read about the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men like what happened when Saul was anointed to be king? “Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you, and you will prophecy with them and be turned into another man... And so it was, when he had turned his back from Samuel, that God gave him another heart; and all these signs came to pass that day” (1 Sam.10:6,9). This is also seen in the divine promise to the prophets: “...I will put a new spirit within them, and take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh” (Eze.11:19), and “I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live...” (Ezek. 37:14). “Shall I bring the time of birth and not deliver?” says the Lord (Is.66:9); “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh...” (Joel 2:28).

❖ What do you think, my brothers? Do you believe that the Lord wishes to reprimand the teacher of the Jews to ridicule him? The Lord knew exactly what He was doing for He desired that this man would be born of the Spirit, and no one can receive this blessing unless he becomes humble. Humility in itself qualifies us to be born of the Spirit for “the Lord is near to those who have a broken heart...” (Ps.34:18). Being a teacher made Nicodemus extremely self confident and this is obvious from the manner he felt his importance as a teacher of the Jews. The Lord diminished his pride in order to offer him the new birth. He reprimanded him as though he were an ignorant man. By this the Lord was not seeking to underline that He is the Master for where is the point of comparison between God and man, or between the truth and falsehood?³¹

St. Augustine

❖ The Lord speaks to him and reproves him...notice that He does not accuse him of anything evil but of weakness and naïveté. Someone might ask: What is the relationship between (spiritual) birth and Judaism? This birth had been proclaimed in the past through symbols, and this occurs in the source where Elisha made the metal rod to float; at the Red Sea where they Jews crossed over; in the pool where the angel of the Lord came and stirred the waters; and in the purification of Namaan the Syrian from leprosy in the River Jordan. Moreover, the words of the prophet refer to the manner of this birth. For example: ‘A posterity shall serve Him, it will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation, they will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this’ (Ps.22:30, 31). ‘...so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s (Ps.103:5). Isaac was also a symbol for that birth. Tell me, Nicodemus how was Isaac born? Was he born according to natural Law? Impossible. The manner of his birth was something in between the birth we are speaking

³¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 12:6.*

about and a natural birth.

It was a natural birth for it was the fruit of two couples living together; and it was another manner of birth as he was not born through the blood (since the mother was barren and the father was aged and old) and yet he was born but according to the Will of God³².

St. John Chrysostom

“Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak of what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness” [11].

Here the Lord uses the plural probably to indicate that He is speaking in the name of the Holy Trinity Who yearns for the new birth of mankind. He desires every believer to enjoy fellowship with the Trinity. Because it is hard for a normal person to comprehend the new spiritual birth, the Lord Jesus Christ presents His testimony and that of the Father. He explains their heavenly concept of that astonishing birth granted from above through the work and action of the Holy Spirit within the waters of baptism.

“If I have told you of earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things”? [12]

The Lord speaks of ‘earthly **things**’ when He mentions ‘the wind that blows where it wishes and we hear the sound of **it** but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes’ [8]. He is also referring to the ‘destruction of the temple of His Body’ (2:19). The ‘heavenly things’ are spiritual birth and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and His ascension into the heavens.

Baptism is a spiritual birth that takes place on earth so that believers can begin their journey to heaven. They are enabled to do so through their union with the Lord Jesus Christ Who has ascended into heaven. How can someone who is unable to accept the spiritual birth be able to ascend with the heart to heaven?

This is the how a person begins to soar with the heart and mind and all his/her inner depths towards the heavens. The inability to accept spiritual birth makes them part of those physically oriented ones who have not yet accepted to begin this heavenly journey. For how can they ascend with the Lord to His heavens unless they receive His Body and Blood, acknowledge the mystery of the Holy Trinity and His work within the believer, and enjoy fellowship with the heavenly ones?

❖ Some consider that the expression ‘**earthly things**’ refers to the wind to imply that ‘if I have given you an example of earthly things and yet you have not believed even that, then how can you learn of heavenly matters?’

Do not be astonished that He called Baptism an earthly matter for it is accomplished on earth or could stand to comparison with His awesome birth. For although this birth is heavenly, yet compared to the real birth that comes from the same Father, it is still considered an earthly one. The Lord does not say: ‘You do not understand’ but rather ‘**You do not believe.**’ This happens when a person is inclined to misinterpret certain matters that are logically conceivable and is truly unwilling to accept them. In this case it is possible to accuse him of lack of understanding. However, when that person refuses to accept matters that cannot be comprehended with the mind but by faith only, then the

³² *Homilies on St. John, 26:2.*

accusation against him would be that he lacks belief rather than understanding³³.

St. John Chrysostom

“No one has ascended into heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is the Son of Man who is in heaven.” [13]

The Lord may be referring to a mistaken understanding that some Jews have concerning Moses. They believe that Moses ascended to heaven to receive the commandments and then descended to Israel. The Lord corrects that by confirming that no one has ascended to heaven except the Son of Man who descended from heaven and remained in His Divinity filling the heavens. He alone can reveal the heavenly mysteries, carry believers into heaven, and offer them the will of God.

Nicodemus spoke with the Lord as he perceived Him to be a prophet from God. It would have been fitting for him to perceive that the Lord is greater than a prophet. By His incarnation He descended from heaven, and by His Divinity He reigns in heaven. He is Lord come from heaven (1 Cor.15:47).

❖ If you asked: ‘What is the link between these words and what was said?’ My answer would be: ‘They are closely linked because when Nicodemus told the Lord: **“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God...”**’; the Lord wanted to dismiss that same statement and said something that would communicate the following: ‘Do not think that I have come to fit the role of a teacher like many other prophets who are here on earth. Rather I have come from heaven while I live there as well.’

Have you grasped how the Lord Jesus Christ is not in heaven only but that He is present everywhere and fills all His creatures?

St. John Chrysostom

❖ He descended for our sake, therefore let us ascend for His sake. He alone has descended and ascended, for He says: **“No one has ascended into heaven but He who came down from heaven...”** Do not those whom He has made children of God ascend to heaven? They definitely do ascend, and this is the promise offered to us: **“...for they are equal to the angels...”** Then how is it that no one ascends except He who descended? Because only One has descended and He is the One who has ascended. Then what about the others?... This is the hope of the others: **that He has descended so that through and in Him they may become one; these are the ones who will ultimately ascend through Him...** it is this that indicates the unity of the Church. Woe to them who hate unity and make themselves leaders of human factions³⁴.

❖ It is time we traveled. However, this journey does not require us to rub our feet with ointment (to help us walk), or to have an animal (to ride upon), or even a ship. May you be able to run with heart-felt feelings so that you may travel in the companionship of love and ascend with love. Why do you search for the path? Adhere to the Lord who through His descent has made Himself to be the ‘Way.’ Do you want to ascend? Then adhere to Him who has ascended. Alone, you will be unable to ascend...since no one can ascend except He who has descended, that is the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. So, do you want to ascend too?

³³ *Homilies on St. John, 27:1.*

³⁴ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 12:8-9.*

Become a member in the Body of the sole One who ascends. Only those who are members of His Body can ascend and so His words are fulfilled when He says: **“No one has ascended into heaven but He who came down from heaven....”**

‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh (Eph. 5:31). The Lord had not left His Father with the intention of appearing equal to Him, but in order to make Himself ‘of no reputation, taking the form of a servant...’(Phil.2:7).

Moreover, He also left His mother and the union that led to His birth according to the flesh. Ultimately, He adhered to His wife who is the Church.

Here, in this passage, the Lord is in that situation where He testifies and reveals that the marriage bond cannot be released (Matt.19:4) ...for ‘they are no longer two but one flesh’ and similarly **“No one has ascended into heaven but He who came down from heaven....”**

So that you may know that the bride and the bridegroom are one in relation to the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ, and not in relation to His Divinity...So that you may know that this complete whole is one Jesus Christ, therefore Isaiah spoke these words: “He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with adornments...” (Is.61:10, LXX)³⁵.

St. Augustine

2- The New Birth and the Offering on the Cross

“An as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up...” [14].

Here the Lord states the purpose for which He has descended from the heavens: so that He might be lifted up on the Cross and grant mankind redemption.

The last miracle that Moses performed before his death was the lifting up of the bronze serpent in the desert and healing the nation from the bites of the serpents (Ex.21:6-9). In the same manner, it is through the Cross that our Lord redeems us from the curse of the Law which we have broken and which consequently became as the fiery and deadly snake bites. The Lord’s offering on the Cross is the balm in Gilead which heals from deadly diseases (Jer.8:22, 46:11).

The bronze snake is a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ. It looks like the fiery and deadly serpent. However, it has a healing power over poison and does not carry its sting. In the same manner, our Lord carried the likeness of the corrupt sinful body yet there was no sin in Him. Since He carried sin for our sakes, He could break the sting of sin on our behalf.

When the serpent became cursed, the Lord became cursed on our behalf in order to liberate us from the circle of the curse and carry us into the light of His glorious Throne. Moses the prophet raised the bronze serpent, and he testified for the Lord Jesus Christ who become subject to the Law.

Origen the Scholar has a wonderful commentary about the Cross for he conceives two realities: the first is a phenomenon as the Lord Jesus Christ loves mankind and obeys God so much that He willingly goes to His crucifixion. The other is a less obvious fact as the one who got really crucified and paralyzed is Satan. The Lord actually nailed the sentence against us for ‘having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it’ (Col 2:14, 15). On one hand, the raised

³⁵ *Sermon on New Testament Lessons, 41:7-8.*

serpent represents the Lord Jesus Christ bearing our sins; and on the other hand, it represents the old serpent that the Lord has nailed by His Cross and degraded from his authority over believers.

❖ This is the original symbol of the serpent that Moses raised on the Cross so that all those that the serpent had harmed would be healed. Similarly, by looking to the bronze serpent, the believer is healed through faith (Num. 21:19; Jn 3:14, 15). So does the bronze serpent heal when it is crucified while the incarnated Son of God does not save?! Note how wood often carried the promise of life: at the time of Noah, life was preserved in the wooden ark; and in the days of Moses, the wooden staff of Moses was used to strike the Sea and so enabled the people of God to cross over. So does the staff of Moses have power while the Cross of the Lord lack it?! In the days of Moses, the water became sweet by means of a piece of wood; while when Christ was on the wooden Cross, the water 'flowed out of His side'³⁶.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ You might wonder: what was the purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ in not stating clearly that He will be crucified and just hinted to His hearers by mentioning an old symbol (the serpent)? My answer is as follows: First in order to let us know that the sayings of the Old Testament agree with the New Testament, the first is not in contradiction to the second; Secondly: so that we may know that the Lord did not come unwilling into the world. Besides, so that we may know that He was unharmed by the actual sufferings He went through; and that these sufferings constitute for many a source of salvation. Indeed, no one should say: How can those who believe in the Crucified be saved if He Himself was caught by death? That is why the Lord reminds us of the old story. Moreover, if the Jews have escaped death by looking at a bronze serpent then how much more will believers in the Crucified enjoy greater benefits with good reason? The crucifixion was not achieved due to the weakness of the Crucified or due to the overruling power of the Jews but because **“God loved the world” [16]**. Therefore His living tabernacle (His Body) hurried towards the Cross³⁷.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ What are the serpents that sting? These are sins issuing from the corruption and death of the flesh.

What does the serpent that was lifted up stand for? It is the Lord who died on the Cross: Just as death came through the serpent, its figure became the symbol for it.

The sting of the serpent is deadly, but the Lord's death is life-giving. Indeed, when the Lord looks at the serpent it loses its power. How is that so? When He looks at death, it loses its power. But whose death is it? The death of life...by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ (Life), death dies.

The death of Life has terminated death since the Fullness of life has devoured death. Death has been become extinct in the Body of the Lord.

Therefore we sing together with the vanquishers about the resurrection and say: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Cor.15:54)...

There's a vast difference between a symbol and the Reality: the symbol lends a temporary existence, whereas the Reality that is represented by the symbol provides

³⁶ *Essay 13:20.*

³⁷ *Homilies on St. John, 27:2).*

eternal life³⁸.

❖ In order to present a symbol for His Cross, the merciful God ordered Moses to lift up the image of a serpent on a post in the desert. It was necessary to have a symbol of the crucified Lord who took the form of a corrupt body (Jn.3:14). The Psalmist intentionally looks at the Cross and says: **“My eyes fail from seeking Your salvation and Your righteous word** (Ps 119:123), for God made the Lord Jesus Christ ‘who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him’ (Rom.8:3; 2Cor.5:21).

In order to express the righteousness of God, the Psalmist says that his eyes fail to look jealously and with fervor as he knows human weakness. However, he depends on the Lord Jesus Christ for divine grace and help.

St. Augustine

❖ My serpent is a beneficial one. Healing medicine proceeds from his mouth and there is no poison there.

St. Ambrose

❖ The Savior was not the serpent, but He was a symbol of it.

Origen

❖ The Law indicates that the One who appeared on the Cross had the likeness of the serpent. Yet He was not the serpent but as St. Paul explains He had ‘the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom.8:3). Therefore the real serpent is sin, and anyone who commits sin takes on the nature of the serpent. In this manner man has become released from sin by Him who took the form of sin³⁹.

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nicea

❖ The serpent represented the Lord Jesus Christ because, when the Jews treated Him as though He were a serpent, they were affected by the serpent’s poison- that is by Satan. At the same time, those who had been stung by the serpent were healed when it was lifted up.

St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis

“...that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” [15]

❖ Do you comprehend the purpose of the Cross and the salvation that proceeds from it? Do you comprehend the relevance of the symbol to the Truth? This is how the Jews were saved from death, and how believers are saved from eternal death through the Lord Jesus Christ. In the case of the Jews, there was a serpent lifted up and which healed the stings of the serpent. Now, the crucified Lord heals the wounds inflicted by the monster of the mind. In the first case, the beholder of the serpent was saved through his **sense of sight**. But in the second case, the beholder lays all sin on the Crucified. There the lifted one was a bronze object in the form of a serpent, but now the Crucified is the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. John Chrysostom

³⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 12:11.*

³⁹ *Vita Moysis. PG 44:413,315.*

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” [16]

In this chapter, the focus is on the glory of the Cross. On it the Son of Man is lifted up in order to attract and deliver all mankind. This is repeated four times (8:28; 12:32-34). Divine love is the dynamic element constantly working to offer the world the joy of salvation.

In his article on repentance, St. Ambrose draws our attention to significance of faith which enables a person to enjoy eternal life. Therefore how can we stop praying for unbelievers so that they may receive the divine gift of faith and so attain eternal life⁴⁰?

❖ It is as though the Lord is saying: ‘Do not be amazed that I should be lifted up on the Cross so that you might be saved for this is God’s decision. He has loved you so much that He has sacrificed His Son for His slaves. Clearly none of you would do that for a friend or for any righteous person.’ This is what St. Paul clarifies when he says: “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone will even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that we were still sinful, Christ died for us” (Rom.5:7, 8).

If you asked: For what reason did God love the world? My answer would be: He loved it out of His own goodness solely and for no other reason.

St. John Chrysostom

The expressions ‘...**God so ...**’ and ‘...**loved the world...**’ underline the great extent of His love. The distinction between the two is great and infinite for He is the eternal who is without beginning and the Almighty without end; whereas those of the world are dust and ashes and are charged with heaps of sin and ingratitude. They rebel against Him continuously yet they are the ones He has loved! The words that follow bear a similar meaning, for He says: “...**He gave His only begotten Son....**” He did not sacrifice a servant or an angel or archangel. No one shows concern for his child as much as the Lord shows towards His ungrateful slaves.

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved [17].

On the Cross the Loved offered salvation openly and before the whole world: “The Lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earths shall see the salvation of our God” (Is.52:10).

Earlier on the Lord had stated a negative aspect that those who believe will not die. Now He follows with the positive statement that they will be granted ‘everlasting life.’ Here too there is the negative ‘...**not...to condemn**’ and the positive ‘...**be saved....**’ The Lord’s words “...**that the world through Him might be saved**” were not only new to the ears of the Jewish leaders and people, but they were a stumbling block as well. This was because the teachers had interpreted the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the awaited Messiah in the sense that He would rebuild the tabernacle of David, restore the kingdom to the people of Israel with all its glory and greatness, and condemn and wipe out the other nations. No matter how it was presented, the idea that He would redeem and save the world could never be acceptable or conceivable to the Jewish mentality.

⁴⁰ Concerning Repentance, 1:10:48.

❖ Before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ we had countless guide posts to show us the good path: there were the laws of nature, the prophets, the written Law and teachings, numerous promises and revelations of the fathers, the punishments and corrective measures as well as numerous other commandments. As a result there was accountability. However, because of His love, He is forgiving to a great extent rather than judging; and He does so for the sake of those who are hastening towards destruction⁴¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The Lord does not condemn, so do you condemn?

He says: “...**whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness**” (Jn 12:46). That means that if a person is in the darkness, he does not remain there. Rather, he corrects his faults and imperfections, and obeys My commands, for I have said: ?????????????? (read)

I have said that he who believes in Me will not be condemned and I fulfill this for I have not come to condemn but that the world might be saved by Me [17]. I desire to pardon and forgive quickly “for I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6) ...and “For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Sacrifice is the order of the law while mercy comes in the gospel: “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (read Jn 1:17)⁴²

St. Ambrose

3- Enlightenment and Faith

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” [18].

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not a mere theoretical belief. It is a practical union and fellowship with Him. A person who disappears in Him and remains steadfast will definitely be released from the circle of condemnation for “there is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1). And once more, the Lord confirms: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (Jn. 5:24).

❖ You might say: ‘Since the Lord did not come with the purpose of condemning the world, then how is it that He has already passed judgment on those who do not believe and while the day of judgment has not come yet?’ The answer is: ‘The Lord could be declaring what will happen in the future. It is like the case of the murderer who is not judged according to the nature of the judge but according to his crime. Similarly, an unbeliever is condemned by the nature of his denial and blasphemy. Adam died the day he ate of the tree, for the pronouncement on that issue has already been pronounced: “...but of the tree of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Yet Adam continued to live so how did he die? We answer: ‘He died due to the case ruling over him and by the nature of his rebellious act: anyone who

⁴¹ Hom. 26 PG 29:195.

⁴² Concerning Repentance, Book 1:12:54.

exposes himself to punishment becomes subject to it and even if no action is taken to punish him swiftly yet his punishment has already have been pronounced.

St. John Chrysostom

“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” [19].

The reference here is to thieves and highway robbers who usually do evil in the darkness of the night. God has granted the sun to give light to men and so that they might work by day and rest by night. As for those who choose to sleep during the daytime in order to do evil at night, then they deserve to be punished as ones who have broken the law of God. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is light: He has come and shone into the world in order to grant mankind the joy of working for the kingdom of God. At the same time He has set the just pronouncement on those who walk in darkness and are haters of the true light. In other words, the incarnation and dwelling of the true Word among us has separated the lovers of the light from those who love darkness and the Spirit of judgment has begun to work. Therefore He says: “...the ruler of this world is judged...” (Jn. 15:11); “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out (Jn, 12:31).

“...because their deeds were evil” since they insist on walking in darkness and adhering to Satan while they reject “**the Light**” and Savior of the world.

❖ It is as though the Lord is saying: ‘If I had come to the world to punish and demand reasons for their wrong doing, people rightly would have used this as an excuse to explain why they have moved away and sought to escape. However, I have come to help them out of the darkness. Therefore they are condemned since they did not abandon the darkness and come to the Light. They can no longer present any other excuse.

St. John Chrysostom

“For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed” [20].

The wicked love darkness when it is more convenient to do their evil acts. They hate the light as it exposes them. The Bible is frightful for the wicked world which considers It an enemy that rebukes and condemns. A person who practices bad habits cannot stand the light and immerses himself into the darkness rather than facing it and praying for the light: “For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatsoever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: “Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead. And Christ will give you light” (Eph 5:12-14).

There is a difference between those who comprehend the Logos (the Word of God) for some conceive Him as a lamp while others see Him as light itself...the ignorant virgins had unlit lamps (Matt. 25:2) “**For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed**” (Jn 3:20). The Lord also rebukes those who do not benefit constantly of the light which is with them for an hour or a little while (Jn 5:35) and as they use that lamp. The Lord says: “He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a while to rejoice in his light (Jn 5:35).

❖ Hurry, my brothers, so that the darkness might not overtake you. Awake to your need

of salvation. Awake while there is time...Awake while the day is here and it is shining. The Lord is the Day and He is ready to forgive sins but only to those who admit them. He is ready to punish those who defend themselves and those who boast of their righteousness and believe they are worthy while they are nothing⁴³.

St. Augustine

❖ For the Lord came to perfect the law and not to criticize It (Matt 5:17). He revealed to us the true offering, the 'Passover' from Egypt. It marks the beginning of the months and occurs in the month when the crossing over took place. It also marks the beginning of a new birth as a new way of life starts for those who abandon darkness behind them and come to the light (Jn 3:20-21). They therefore speak in a style that conforms with the holy mystery and through the power of the water granted to those who hope in the Lord. This is what is known as 'the washing of renewal' (Jn 3:5). Therefore what does the second birth convey other than the beginning of another birth?⁴⁴

Origen

“But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” [21].

The words '...he who does the truth....' occurs to counter he who does evil and whose 'deeds are wicked.' The singular is used for there is one life in the Lord Jesus Christ and adhering to Him. In contrast the plural is used to refer to evil acts and deeds as they occur in an uninterrupted chain of dark actions. The amazing observation is that when we perform truthful acts, meaning that when we adhere to the Lord, we come to the light- that is to the person of the Lord- and it seems as though the more we adhere to Him the more the fervor of our heart increases. As a result we yearn to really enter and unite intensely with the Lord. Consequently, we, as believers, becomes increasingly attracted day after day in the hope of attaining 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13).

When we practice the truth, we receive the light so that our deeds occur in the presence of the Lord and by His help and grace. This is the conclusion of our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus. Since we have become adopted to be His sons, it is appropriate that we, the believers, enjoy the possibilities God provides through Him and in Him. The light of truth that fills the believer with joy is in itself hateful to the wicked. He cannot tolerate the light and considers it an enemy that resents and opposes him. The Lord's words **“...they have been done by God”** express His affirmation that the righteousness of the believer is based on the work of God within him, “...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:13).

❖ Being considered a person is the result of God's work. However, being considered a sinner is the result of man's own work or deeds.

Therefore erase what you have done so that God might redeem what He has done.

It is appropriate for you to hate what you have done to yourself, and to love the work of God in you.

When you are displeased with your own actions, you would have begun to do God's good work since you have found fault with your wicked actions.

The confession of wicked deeds is the beginning of doing that which is good.

You do what is true and you come to the light. How do you do what is true? You do not

⁴³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 12:14.*

⁴⁴ *Peri Pascha 4 (Translated by Robert J. Daly-ACW).*

spoil, release, or flatter yourself. Moreover, you do not say: 'I am righteous' while you are not. That is how you start to do what is true.

You come to the light to declare that your actions are done only through God and His help. Otherwise, it will be impossible for you to recognize your sin, the very thing you hate, and to despise it. You can do this only when God shines within you and reveals the truth to you.

As for a person who loves wickedness even after he has received advice, he clearly hates the light that guides him and evades it. This is because the actions he loves to take do not appear to be wicked to him. Whereas a person who loves to do what is true condemns his own evil actions and does not provide justification or forgives himself until God forgives him.

He who desires God's forgiveness needs to recognize his own faults, come to the light, and give thanks for revealing what he needs to hate in himself. He prays God "...to hide (His) face from (his) sins..." Yet how can he dare to say this unless he adds: "For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me..." (Ps.51:3, 9).

May your sins remain before you if you do not want to put them before the Lord. However, if you put them behind you, God will push them and put them before your eyes. This occurs at a time when the fruit of repentance is no longer found within⁴⁵.

St. Augustine

❖ The Lord spoke these words to describe those who have chosen to remain in their wickedness for ever. He came for that purpose and in order to grant forgiveness for previous sins. Besides, He came to safeguard us from future trespasses since there are those who are careless and perverted. These are so far removed from virtue that they wish to remain in their wickedness until their very last breath. Indeed, they are unable to distance themselves from evil at any moment of their lives.

St. John Chrysostom

4- The Stance of John the Baptist on the Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ

'After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized' [22].

The Lord left Jerusalem 'in the land of Judea' where He had met and spoken with Nicodemus, and visited other areas of Judea. The Bible often makes the distinction between Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 1:8, 10:30; 1Kgs3:34; 2Kgs 1:1, 10) The Lord Jesus Christ did not baptize but His disciples did so through His authority and command (Jn 4:2). That is why they considered it as though He was baptizing.

❖ The Lord used to go up to Jerusalem during the feasts as He wanted people to benefit from His teachings and miracles. When the celebrations were over, He would go to Jordan as many would travel and go there. He always went to places where there would be crowds in order to offer the many the blessings inherent in Him. Indeed, He did not do so in order to reveal Himself or to seek Honor. Therefore St. John the Evangelist clarifies this and says: **'(though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples)' (Jn.4:2).**

St. John Chrysostom

⁴⁵St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 12:13.*

‘Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salem, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized’ [23].

The Lord Jesus Christ began to baptize through His disciples before John the Baptist is put in prison in order to draw the disciples of the Baptist towards Himself. In this way they would not get scattered after his martyrdom. Besides, this would insure that the cycle of work would not end with the Baptist’s death. In fact St. John the Baptist continued to collaborate harmoniously, preaching and seriously preparing for the Kingdom of God until his very last breath.

Aenon: is about eight miles south of Scythopolis, and lies between Salem and Jordan.

It is clear that the Baptist always baptized by immersion as the Evangelist says:

“...because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized’ [23].

❖ **‘...Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples’...why?** Note the Baptist’s words: “...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire...” (Matt 3:11; Lk 3:16). Until that moment, the Holy Spirit had not been granted and therefore it was valid that He did not baptize. However, His disciples did baptize in order to attract many to the faithful teachings... Then why did the Baptist not stop baptizing if that would have added awe to the stature of the disciples? In order to avoid arousing any competition among his disciples and which would have been worse than any hostility... besides, while the Baptist was baptizing he did not cease to underline to them the greatness and awesome nature of the Lord’s acts...

Was the baptism performed by the disciples better than the one done by the Baptist? No, it was not better in any way. Both were done without the gift of the Holy Spirit. So they were similar and shared the same objective which was to lead those who got baptized to the Lord Jesus Christ⁴⁶.

St. John Chrysostom

‘For John had not yet been thrown into prison’ [24].

‘The there arose a dispute between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purification’ [25].

❖ The disciples of the Baptist were always jealous of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and of His disciples who were baptizing. They began to argue with those who had been baptized and so they appeared to believe that their baptism were better than the one done by the Lord’s disciples. They caught some who had been baptized and tried to convince them of that but they failed. Note how the Evangelist implies that they began, at first, to attack (the Lord) ...he does not say that a Jew asked them but that they aroused the doubt, and that the questioning was raised by the Baptist’s disciples and directed to the Jews⁴⁷.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The Baptist was baptizing and so was the Lord...the disciples of the Baptist were moving and running towards the Lord...the Baptist delivered those who went to him to the Lord so that He would baptize them; whereas those who went to the Lord were not sent to the Baptist.

⁴⁶ Hom. 29 PG 59:165

⁴⁷ Hom. 29 PG 59:165-166.

The disciples of the Baptist were disturbed, and according to custom, they began to discuss these matters with the Jews.

Let us remember that the Jews admitted that the Lord Jesus Christ was greater, and that the people would necessarily turn to His baptism. The Baptist's disciples understood that as well; yet they defended John's baptism and came to him personally to solve the matter.

Remember, dear ones, we have been granted the grace to learn how to apply humility. When the people were wrong in their discussion of this matter, it was a chance to reveal if the Baptist was seeking honor for himself...

He wisely knew before whom to be humble: before the One he knew had come after him by birth; yet he willingly admitted His primacy and acknowledged Him. The Baptist understood that his own salvation is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Long before that incident, John had said: "And of His fullness we have all received...." In this statement, the Baptist confesses that the Lord is God; for how can we all receive of His fullness if He were not God?...

He is the Source and they are the partakers of Him. Those who drink from a source get thirsty later on. The Source never thirsts and does not turn to Himself. However, mankind need the Source and run to Him to quench their thirsty stomach and their dry lips. And the Source flows in order to revive: this is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ⁴⁸.

St. Augustine

'And they came to John and said to him: "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified- behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"[25].

The disciples of the Baptist revealed their respect for him they addressed him as 'Rabbi'; and yet, on account of their love and jealousy for him, they showed disrespect to the Lord. They did not even mention the name of the Lord but spoke lightly and referred to Him as '**He who was with you.**' They believed that what the Lord was doing was an act of ingratitude towards the Baptist who had baptized and witnessed for Him. They did not realize that the Lord had no need for the testimony of John or for men's praise. Indeed, the Father Himself witnessed for Him and the Holy Spirit appeared and rested on Him. They believed that baptism by the Lord's disciples was degrading for the baptism done by John and as though there was rivalry among the two parties.

❖ '**He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified**' conveys the meaning of 'that one who has the rank of a disciple, and who is no more than us...that person has separated himself and is baptizing.' John's disciples believed that this would make the Baptist envious. To underline that they stressed that their popularity was on the decline by saying: "**and all are coming to Him!**"[25]. Their behavior revealed them to be no better than the Jews who had argued with Him. They spoke these words because they were torn in their inclinations and they had not dismissed the sense of competition which filled them⁴⁹.

St. John Chrysostom

'John answered and said: "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to

⁴⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 13:8.*

⁴⁹ *Homilies on St. John, 27:1*

him from heaven” [27].

The Baptist was neither disturbed nor embarrassed; but proclaimed joyfully and with a glad spirit that what the Lord was doing is authorized by heaven. He found this a good opportunity to confirm and clarify for a second time his witness for the Lord. Listen to what John the Baptist tells his disciples. Rather than reprove them harshly and risking that they would forsake him and commit some other bad behavior, he told them that ‘**A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven**’...for a while he wished to strike them with fear and terror and to reveal to them that they were actually fighting God when they fought the Lord Jesus Christ. In this context, the Baptist established this reality indirectly and it is the same truth that Gamaliel confirmed: “...but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it –lest you even be found to fight against God” (Acts 5:39). Therefore the saying that ‘**A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven**’ is a pronouncement that they are fighters against God and so attempting the impossible. Notice also that when they said: ‘**to whom you have testified**’ [26] the Baptist opposed them as they seemed to degrade the power of the Lord and silenced them by his words ‘**A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven**’ [27]. If you hold on to my testimony and consider it to be true, then acknowledge this and do not prefer me over Him. You have to prefer Him over me otherwise why have I testified? ‘I pray you yourselves to bear to my witnesses [28]⁵⁰.

St. John Chrysostom

St. Augustine believes that John the Baptist is speaking here about himself as being a person who has been granted heavenly insight but that he is not the Messiah. It is as though he is saying: [‘Why do you deceive yourselves? Look at how you put this problem to me and at what you are saying?.. Because I have received something from heaven in order to fulfill certain task, do you want me to empty myself of that by saying things that oppose the truth?... I am the news reporter and He is Judge]⁵¹.

“You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ’ but ‘I have been sent before Him’ [28].

It is as though John is saying here: “I am the servant carrying the words of Him who has sent me.” The expression ‘**I have been sent before Him**’ in the Greek language implies continuity in the action and giving fruit as a result of it.

❖ ‘Do adhere to my testimony... If you consider me trustworthy, then one of the things I told you is that: “**I have been sent before Him**” [28] ...for He is not diminished by my witness for Him. On the contrary, I am elevated by it. After a while it will become evident that this Voice is a divine one, and therefore the testimony does not proceed from me but it comes from God.’ The words of the Baptist convey the following meaning: ‘I am a servant and I speak the words of Him who has sent me. I do so to serve His Father who has sent me and not in order to flatter the Lord Jesus Christ for any personal interest. Moreover, I do not testify through a gift inherent in me but speak as I have been commissioned to do. Therefore do not consider that I am great, but rather that He is great... for He is Lord above all things⁵².

⁵⁰ *Homilies on St. John 29:2*

⁵¹ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 13:9*

⁵² *Homilies on St. John 29:2*

“He who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled” [29].

In Jewish culture, the friend of the bridegroom is called *showshabiyn*; and in the Greek culture *paranymphos*. Usually there was a friend for the bridegroom and one for the bride and most often the brother would be the bridegroom’s friend.

Sometimes, however, there would not be a specific person who is the friend of either the bride or the bridegroom. In contrast, there had to be a friend of the bridegroom when the wedding was that of a king or nobleman or other very highly ranked person. The Jews believed that this custom has been instituted by God as He Himself was the *showshabiyn* at Adam’s wedding. **Bereshith Rabba**, however, writes that Adam had two friends at his wedding: Michael and Gabriel.

The friend of the bridegroom played a vital and unique role: he would be relieved of his religious obligations in order to help the newly wed couple throughout the first seven days. Before the wedding, he had to protect the bride, attend to her, and report to the bridegroom as well as act as a liaison or link between them. He would carry letters they wished to exchange as the engaged female was not allowed to leave the home of her parents.

After the wedding, the friend would help to strengthen the personality of the bride. He would live close by to ensure that no harm would touch her and that neither party would deceive the other. Moreover, it was his duty to examine her purity and once he was assured, he would rejoice. This is probably what St. John means when he says:

“Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled” [29]. The friend also brings the presents offered to the couple and ultimately shares in the joyful wedding celebrations that last for seven days.

After this celebration that extends for a week, the friend of the bridegroom becomes more like a defender for him (2 Cor 11:2). Therefore he solves any marital problems that may arise and restores harmony.

The bridegroom’s friend keeps the wedding contract with him. If he finds that the bride is unfaithful, he has the authority to tear up the contract and so the wedding would be considered as annulled. However, if the bridegroom abandons and divorces her, the friend fills in the role of her legal brother (the husband’s brother)⁵³.

St. John the Baptist proclaims his joy because the divine Bride has come. He joins the men of God in the Old Testament who expressed that joy towards the Bride. **St. Gregory, Bishop of Nicea**, expresses that thought in his interpretation of The Song of Solomon as he says: **“Those who serve the virgin bride and accompany her are the patriarchs, the prophets, and teachers of the law.** They offer to the Bride the wedding presents (such as the remission of sins, the resolution to stop wicked acts, the purification from sin, a change in nature in the sense that the corrupt nature will become pure, the enjoyment of Paradise, and infinite joy).

When the Bride receives all these presents from the nobility and from all those who carry these gifts through their prophetic teachings, she proclaims her eagerness and hurries to enjoy the privilege and the beauty of the One she has desired for so long. The servants and the companions of the Bride listen to her and encourage Her to be more desirous. Then the Bridegroom arrives and leads a crowd of singers that includes His

⁵³ Adam Clark Comm.

friends and well wishers. These represent the spirits of the pure prophets or those who serve and rescue mankind.

When they hear the voice of the Bridegroom, they rejoice (Jn3:29) as the pure union is fulfilled and the soul that adheres to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. This is also proclaimed by the St. Paul, the apostle (1 Cor.6:17)⁵⁴.

❖ Those who expect that the Lord will come again stand eagerly and attentively at the gates of heaven and wait for the time when the King of glory enters into His grace. This will exceed all imagination and according to Psalm 19:5 ‘which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber.’

In spite of our sins and our worship of idols and God’s consequent removal; we have been granted the new birth and have become as a first born after being washed of our inner corruption. Therefore all the wedding celebrations have been fulfilled and the Word of God has been united to the Church, and as St. John says: **“He who has the bride is the bridegroom,”** (Jn.3:29).

And the Church has received the Bride in the wedding bridal room. And the angels have expected the return of the King as He leads the Church as His Bride. Through His leadership, He has made Her nature ready to receive grace. He has therefore said that our lives have to be cleaned of all evil and deceit so that we too are ready to receive the Lord when He comes again.

When we watch the doors of our homes, we prepare ourselves for the arrival of the Bridegroom and for the time when He will call and knock at the door for: “Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching” (Lk 12:37). For he is blessed who obeys the One who is knocking.

The soul is eager for this blessing of welcoming her Bridegroom who stands at the door. She watches the door of her home alertly and says: “It is the voice of my beloved! He knocks... (Sg of Sol.5:3). How would the bridegroom deny her the privilege when she has reached up to Him who is ultimately most holy?”⁵⁵

St. Gregory of Nicea

❖ It is as though the Baptist is saying: ‘I would have suffered greatly if this had not happened. It would have given me so much pain and grief if the bride had not come to her bridegroom. However, I am no longer sad since my hopes have been fulfilled and everything we have longed for has taken place: for the bride has recognized her bridegroom and you are witnesses of that. Therefore I am glad and rejoice now that this prayer has been answered.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Listen to what is even much stronger and to a clearer testimony. Notice the matter we are concerned with: for it an adulterous act if someone loves a person and allows him/her to take the place of the Lord Jesus Christ...for **“He who has the bride is the bridegroom”**...so be pure, and love the Bridegroom...

Presently, I see many adulterers who wish to possess the bride, who has been bought for such a great price. She was loved when she was disfigured so that she might become beautiful. She has been bought and received redemption and now she is adorned by that One who has saved her.

As for these adulterers, they struggle with words in order to love someone other than the bridegroom...

⁵⁴ *Song of Solomon by St. Gregory of Nicea, translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, 1993, Sermon 1.*

⁵⁵ *Song of Solomon by St. Gregory of Nicea, translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, 1993, Sermon 11.*

Let us therefore listen to the friends of the bridegroom rather than to the adulterers who oppose him...

Let us listen to that one who is jealous and fervent, yet it is not on his own account⁵⁶.

❖ He says 'I rejoice not on account of my voice but on account of the voice of the bridegroom. I fill in the position of the hearer, while He is the Speaker. As a person, I need to be enlightened, whereas He is the Light. I am like the ear, while He is the Word. That is why the bridegroom's friend stands and listens to him.

Why does he stand? So that he might not fail.

What would prevent him from failing? His humility.

Remember that he is standing on firm ground: "I am not worthy to loosen His sandal straps." You do well to be humble and so you are prepared not to fall. Rather, you are prepared to stand and to hear Him, and to rejoice greatly upon hearing the voice of the bridegroom⁵⁷.

❖ Peter is an eye in this Body; and although that other person is a finger yet he is a member in that same Body to which Peter belongs. Even if the finger has a lesser power than the eye, yet it is not amputated from the Body.

It is better to be a finger in the Body than to be an eye that has been amputated from the Body.

Therefore do not be deceived, my brothers, and let no one impress you. Love the peace that the Lord grants as He, who is God, has been crucified for your sakes. St. Paul says: "So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1Cor 3:7)...

May all the members love one another, and may all live subject to the Head.

In my sadness I have been obliged to speak to you for a long period. However, I have not said enough and so find myself unable to stop⁵⁸.

❖ What brings him joy? He rejoices to hear the voice of his Bridegroom.

This has been fulfilled for me and I have received this blessing. I do not assume a role that is not mine otherwise I would lose my actual status...

People need to understand that they should not rejoice because of their own wisdom, but rather, they should rejoice on account of the wisdom that God has granted them.

No one should ask for more (than what he has) so that he does not lose what he has found; for many people who have claimed wisdom have turned out to be foolish and dull. The apostle rebukes such people and tells them: "...because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them" (Romans 1:19)...

People should not claim for themselves what they have not obtained as a result of their own effort. They need to explain it as the gift that they have received freely from God; otherwise He will withdraw such blessings from the ungrateful. The Baptist did not want that to happen to him for he wanted to be thankful. He confessed he had been blessed, and proclaimed that he rejoiced on hearing the voice of the Bridegroom by saying:

"Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled" [29]⁵⁹.

St. Augustine

"Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled" [29] indicates that 'the task I had to do has been achieved and there is nothing more I can do in the future.' The Baptist tells them

⁵⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 13:10*

⁵⁷ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 13:12*

⁵⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 13:17-18*

⁵⁹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 14:3*

what would take place in the future to prevent arousing intense physical emotions in the present as well as in the future. Therefore he affirms that events are proceeding in agreement with what he had said and done earlier on⁶⁰.

St. John Chrysostom

“He must increase, but I must decrease” [30].

St. John the Baptist understands that the Lord increases and he decreases and this becomes obvious in the manner each has died. The first became a martyr silently when he died in prison; and only very few learned about it. The Lord, however, died in public and on the Cross: He lifted up His Head towards heaven, and spread out His arms to embrace lovingly all mankind. The first died and was buried after he was beheaded; whereas the Lord Jesus Christ died, was buried, and arose in order to resurrect the dead with Him.

The words of St. John the Baptist have relevance to the life of every true believer who is growing in his relationship with the Lord. In each moment of his life, the believer dismisses all that is materialistic and indeed gets to feel that he/she discards that which is human. This is done not with the object of living without a human will or without human feelings, but in order to proclaim the will of God in one’s life. As a result, one’s emotions are sanctified and he acts according to the Lord. In this manner the believer experiences sweetness in his failings as he makes way for the Lord to increase and be glorified in him.

The Lord’s successful ministry marks the starting point for the proclamation of His glorious righteousness, peace, and truth among mankind.

The Baptist rejoices that the number of people coming to him for baptism has diminished. By going to the Lord Jesus Christ, they fulfill the goal of his own service and baptism.

❖ **“He must increase, but I must decrease” [30]...What does this mean: He should be glorified, and I should be humbled?**

How might the Lord Jesus Christ increase? How does God increase? God neither increases nor decreases. If He were to increase then He is not perfect; and if He were to decrease then He is not God...

Could that be a result of His willingness to become man when He became incarnate? He was a child, and although He is the wisdom of God, He lay in a manger as a newly born. Moreover, He sucked milk from his mother in spite of the fact that He is her Creator.

Then the Lord Jesus Christ grew up physically and maybe that is why the Baptist said: **“He must increase, but I must decrease.”** But why is that? Physically, the Baptist and the Lord were of the same age with just six months’ difference between them. Besides, they had grown together...so what is the meaning of **“He must increase, but I must decrease”**?

That is a great mystery!

Before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, men used to glorify themselves.

He came as a person to reduce man’s glory and to increase the glory of God. He came without sin and found all men had fallen into sin. In the form of a man He came to tear sin away and as God grants freely so man has to confess. It is this confession that degrades man, yet it is the tenderness of God that is sublime.

Therefore since the Lord has come to forgive the sins of man, then man has to admit his immorality and may God reveal His tenderness.

⁶⁰ *Homilies on St. John, 29:2*

“He must increase, but I must decrease” or in other words ‘He will grant me good things and I will receive; He will be glorified and I will confess.’ May every person become aware of his own condition and confess to God. Let us listen to what the apostle has to say to the proud and mighty person who praises himself: “And what do you have that you have not received? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?” (1Cor 4:7)⁶¹.

❖ May God who is always perfect grow and increase in you for the more you comprehend Him the more He will appear to increase in you. As for Himself, He does not increase since He is the everlasting Perfection... This is also true of the inner depths of a person for he truly grows in the Lord God who appears increasingly in Him. However, the person himself seems to diminish when he falls away from his own arrogance and establishes the glory of God⁶².

St. Augustine

❖ This means that we have stopped and ceased our wrong doings; whereas the works of the Lord will increase. What you are afraid of will happen not only now but later on and to a greater extent. This specifically increases the brilliance of my situation for I have come for this task. Therefore I rejoice that His objectives are advancing rapidly and that this is the result of my actions. Can you not see that He has gently and wisely soothed their sufferings, calmed their bodies, revealed to them that they had spoken of impossible matters, and that evil had to be controlled?⁶³

St. John Chrysostom

“He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from the heaven is above all” [31]

The Bridegroom descending from heaven (Jn 3:13) is above all: He is greater than Moses, the prophets, and is even greater than John the Baptist himself.

The Baptist speaks about himself as ‘...**he who is of the earth...**’ because he was born in the same way as all other human beings. Consequently, he is unable to speak of matters proclaimed by the heavenly Messiah. He just prepares the way for Him. There is no point of comparison between the prophets (and the Baptist is one of them) and the Lord Jesus Christ. When they witness for the Truth, they are still human vessels on earth through whom God speaks. However, when the Lord Jesus Christ speaks, His words come from heaven for He is heavenly.

❖ He wishes to indicate that the Lord does not need anyone for He is self sufficient and greater than all...so the Baptist says: “...**he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth**” to point to himself...do you see how he has nothing else to say of himself other than that he is of lesser stature and came from the earth and was born of it? As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He had come to them from heaven. With all these words, the Baptist is able to satisfy their jealousy.

❖ It is as though he is saying: ‘If I were to compare my concerns with His, they would appear few, mean, and poor just as all other things which have an earthly nature⁶⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

⁶¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 14:4*

⁶² St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 14:5*

⁶³ *Homilies on St. John, 29:3*

⁶⁴ *Hom. 30 PG 59:170*

❖ When the Baptist speaks about the human aspect of himself (that is in John the Baptist) he is indicating an earthly being who is enlightened by God. If he had not been enlightened, he would have remained earthly and speaking with earthly wisdom...

May the grace of God come and lighten up his darkness according to the words: “For You will light my lamp; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness” (Ps18:28). May God take the thoughts of man and transform them to be his light. Then man will immediately join the apostle and say: “...not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1Cor15:10); and “...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20)... This is the condition of the Baptist since he is of the earth and speaks from the earth. However, the heavenly words you hear from him are inspired by the One who enlightens him and not from the person (the Baptist) who receives them⁶⁵.

St. Augustine

“And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony” [32].

The words spoken by the prophets are simply the testimony of what God has delivered to them through different means. As for the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are proclamations of what He has seen and heard for He is never separated from the Father and He is the Truth Itself.

❖ **“He who comes from above is above all... And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony” [31-32]...He has the Father since He is the Son of God: He has the Father and hears Him...He is the Word of God⁶⁶.**

St. Augustine

“He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true” [33].

❖ When he was in prison, the Baptist sent his disciples to the Lord so that they would get attached to Him...now that the Lord starts to speak the words of God there will be believers and non-believers, those who will believe in God and those who will not...note the words ‘...has certified...’ mean ‘has proclaimed.’ In order to disturb them deeply, he tells them ‘that God is true’ for he wishes to clarify that no one can reject the belief in the Lord Jesus Christ without rejecting God at the same time, and by doing so commits a sin⁶⁷.

St. John Chrysostom

“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure” [34].

Human beings receive the Spirit of God in the measure of their own potential and weakness. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He receives the Spirit without measure since the Spirit is One with Him and resides in Him.

⁶⁵ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate14:6*

⁶⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate14*

⁶⁷ Hom. 30 Pg 59:172

❖ St. John the Baptist says the following about the Lord: **“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God”** because the Lord says nothing other than the words of His Father and says only the words of God. Therefore anyone who opposes the Son is also opposing His Father who has sent Him. Do you see how he disturbed them deeply by his words?

He then says: **“... for God does not give the Spirit by measure”** In other words we have all received the work of the Spirit with measure and proportion but the Lord possesses the Spirit entirely and completely and without measure.

❖ St. John the Baptist says about the Son: **“for God does not give the Spirit by measure”** (Jn3:34) to those who deserve. Therefore there is no measure for the Son as it is impossible to measure Him. He exceeds all measure as He is God. How could you measure the One Who cannot be measured or describe Him as lacking?

St. Cyril the Great

❖ **St. John Chrysostom** writes the following: ‘He is speaking about capacity when he mentions the Spirit.’ We all receive the capacity of the Spirit by measure. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He possesses full capacity and that cannot be measured as it is His in its entirety. Therefore since His capacity is without measure then how much greater is His essence? He refers to the capacity, the Spirit or more adequately the Spirit of God according to the words of the Baptist. By stating that the capacity has no measure he indicates that the nature of the Spirit is not a created one. When he says that we receive the Spirit with measure, he is referring to the different nature of the uncreated capacity that resides in the Essence and that is also not created...now, if the capacity of the Spirit is without measure, then how much more immeasurable is the Essence⁶⁸.

Fr Gregory Palamas

St. John the Baptist draws a distinction between his mission and the Lord’s mission. The mission of John the Baptist is a mission of God ordained to a human apostle who speaks and testifies within the capacity and grace he receives. As for the mission of the Lord, it is the mission of the Son of God and His Word Who is one with Him. He alone sees the Father as He is and can witness for Him. The Spirit of the Son of God is the Spirit of the Holy Father and therefore, unlike the prophets, apostles, or believers in general, He does not receive the Spirit by measure.

❖ **“for God does not give the Spirit by measure” [34]**. Listen to the words of the apostle: “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gifts” (Eph4:7). With reference to human beings, the Spirit is given by measure, but with reference to the Only Son it is given without measure. How does He give to human beings with measure? “...for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing ...to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy...” (1 Cor 12:8...etc)...as for the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Giver, He receives without measure⁶⁹.

St. Augustine

⁶⁸ *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters, Ch 95. St Chry 505, tom. hom. 30:2 Pg 59:173*

⁶⁹ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate14:10*

“The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hands.” [35]

John the Baptist clarifies that the Lord Jesus Christ is far greater than any teacher, prophet, or apostle. Some prophets have received certain talents, others have received certain revelations or visions, others have received dreams, some have received the talent of teaching, while others got the gift of giving comfort, etc...As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He is the only One who possesses everything and holds all in His hands.

❖ **“The Father loves the Son...”** [35], yet He loves as a father loves and not as a lord who loves his slave. Indeed, He loves Him as His only begotten Son rather than an adopted son...That is why when He willingly gave up His Son for our sakes, we should not imagine that the One sent to us is less than the Father. For when the Father sends the Son it is similar to someone sending his other self (as He is One with Him, and is equal to Him)⁷⁰.

St. Augustine

“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” [36]

❖ **Jesus says: “I am the door...”** (Jn 14:6; 10:9); “No one comes to the Father except through Me...”; “...no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt 11:27). Therefore if you deny the One revealed to you, you will remain ignorant. In the Gospel of St. John there is the following statement: ‘...**he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him**’ (Jn 3:36) because the Father gets angry when His only Son is disrespected. A king would be grieved if just one of his soldiers is humiliated, so how would it be if this happens to his only son? Who would be able to appease the anger of the Father on account of His only Son?!⁷¹

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ Someone may ask: ‘So is any person assured of eternal life if he just believes in the Son? The answer is : He certainly is not assured in any way for the Lord Himself said: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt 7:21). For if a person firmly believes in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and yet does not lead a pure life, he will gain nothing from his faith and will not have a single advantage that would help him attain salvation. Therefore do not think that faith is sufficient for our salvation. To ensure our salvation, we need to lead a straight and correct life and follow a chaste path besides faith.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ When someone believes, the wrath of God passes away and life reigns. Therefore in believing in the Lord Jesus Christ you are possessing life since a person who believes in Him will not be condemned (Jn3:15). However, many insist that this statement has a condition attached to it which is that the believer needs to keep the Lord’s commandments. They claim that these are the words of the Lord Himself who has said: “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him (Jn

⁷⁰ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 14:11*

⁷¹ Article 10:1

12:47)⁷².

St. Ambrose

❖ The Baptist does not say: ‘The wrath of God will descend on him’ but rather ‘**the wrath of God abides on him.**’ All those who have been born vulnerable to death and subject to the wrath of God. And what is the wrath of God other than the wrath first caused by Adam...from this genealogy the Son has come, without sin, and was covered with the flesh that is subject to death. If He has shared with us the wrath of God when He bore our sins, then why are we reluctant and slow to share with Him the grace of God? Therefore he who does not believe, the wrath of God abides on him. Why is God angry? According to the apostle, we ‘...were by nature children of wrath, just as others’ (Eph 2:3). All are children of wrath, since they are the outcome of the curse of death. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, for he became vulnerable to death for your sakes. He lived while you were dead. He died so that you may live. He has brought the grace of God, and torn away His wrath. God has conquered death so that death would not conquer man⁷³.

St. Augustine

⁷² *Concerning Repentance, Book 1:12:53-54*

⁷³ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 14:13*

Inspirations drawn from The Gospel of John, Chapter Three

May Your Fiery Spirit Carry Me to the New World!

❖ My depths groan, my body and whole being have swerved towards corporal things,
Greed had governed my depths
But Your grace has rescued me.
You have granted me a birth from the Water and the Spirit!
You have become a heavenly Father for me, and Your Church an immortal Mother. I
have no longer an excuse or a justification,
May Your fiery Spirit carry me to the new world!

❖ You were born in the flesh for my sake,
In order to grant me a heavenly birth by Your Holy Spirit!
You have cleaned me thoroughly in the baptismal water,
And You have granted me victory over the old dragon.
You watered me with the Living Water, so how can I thirst after that?
You have thrown me into the grave with You,
And have resurrected me to enjoy Your resurrected life!
You have granted me a new life, a new spirit, and a new heart.

❖ You have drawn my whole being to Your heavenly heights,
So I find nothing on earth which attracts my heart and thoughts!
I find that you have ascended alone into the heavens, O Resident of heaven!
Accept me as a member of Your Body, for the earth cannot contain me any longer!
You have descended to earth and hidden me in You,
And you have ascended to heaven so that I may live with You where You reside!

❖ The snake killed me with its poison and deceit,
She killed my soul as listened to it.
There You are as the bronze snake raised on the Cross.
I perceive You with the eyes of my heart as You have destroyed the debt I owe!
By Your Cross You have raised me, and drawn me into the Father's embrace!
I rise with You in defiance of the powers of darkness,
Your death has killed my death, and destroyed all its power!
Your Cross has crucified the world to me, and crucified me to the world!
The world has no place in me, and I have no place in it!

❖ Your Cross proclaims the glory of Your sublime love!
Your Cross has opened my heart to embrace all mankind as much as possible!
Your Cross has removed my fear of judgment,
And has filled my heart with yearning for the day of Your coming!

❖ O Sun of Righteousness, You have shone on me from the Cross,
And You have removed all darkness within me.
I run to You O light of my heart!
The Light of Truth has shone within me,
So I realized that you are He brings fills my life with righteousness!

❖ With John the Baptist-Your forerunner and angel-I rejoice and offer praise to you:

I must decrease and You must increase,
May I always realize my weaknesses and faults
And may Your grace constantly grow!
I decrease as I discover more and more my ignorance,
And You increase as you reign fully in my depths,
And as You are more fully revealed within me,
Take complete dominion of all aspects of my life...

Amen.

CHAPTER 4

MEETING WITH THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

THE AMAZING WINNER OF SOULS

The Jews took pride in their land for it was **‘the promised land’** that God had granted to Abraham, the father of believers, as an inheritance for him and his children. At the time of the Lord Jesus Christ this land had become divided into three parts: **Judea** in the South where the city of God, Jerusalem, stands and where there is the Temple that is considered the holiest place in the world; **Galilee** or the Galilee of the Gentiles in the North and many in this area had accepted the Jewish faith; and **Samaria** in the central part of the land. There was a deep and reciprocal hatred between the Samaritans and the Jews. In this chapter, we find the Lord visiting these three parts of the land.

The Lord came to Judea after He had spent the feast in Jerusalem (Jn3:22); and now He was leaving after having spent there four months of harvesting [35]. So He had stayed there for a total time of approximately six months.

On His way to Galilee, the Lord passed through Samaria. At the well, He met a Samaritan woman who had been married five times and now lived with a man who was not hers. In spite of the enmity that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans, the Lord engaged her in a conversation and so drew her to her salvation. Moreover, He turned her into a witness who would preach salvation. He appealed to her so much that she enjoyed the knowledge He offered. She realized that He is the Messiah who informs us of everything. After spending a few minutes with Him, she left her water pot and ran to draw the whole city; and many believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, when someone meets with the amazing Winner of souls he/she gets to share His features and also becomes a winner of souls.

Throughout this meeting, the Lord encourages us to worship in a new manner. He offers the woman and the people of her city living Water whose source springs from within them. He proclaims that He has come instead of Jacob’s well, and He offers Water that whoever drinks of it shall never thirst again since it grants eternal life [14]. He also proclaims that the hour has come when worship will reach a sublime height that is greater than any offered on Mount Gerizim or in the temple. For people will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth [23]. Besides, He has a new food, which is to do the will of the One who has sent Him [24]. He says that the fields are white and ready for the new harvest [35]. The four Evangelists have focused on four important personalities in this conversation: the Lord, the Samaritan woman, the disciples, and the people of the city, besides the narrator. The conclusion of the meeting is that: **“Now we believe...and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world”** [42].

The Evangelist follows the report of this meeting by narrating another one between the Lord and the king’s servant. That person prays the Lord to hurry to his house in

order to heal his son and save him from death. The nobleman hears the living words: "Go your way, your son lives." He believes and his son is healed. In the first meeting, the Samaritan woman and many people of the city of Sychar rejoiced at receiving the new resurrected life; in spite of the fact that they were mostly Gentiles, or half of them, and were the fruit of intermarriages among the Chaldeans and the Jews. In the second meeting, the king's servant and his household rejoiced at receiving the living faith through the physical healing of the son; and in that case the family was probably of the Gentiles as well.

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1-THE LORD'S DEPARTURE FROM JUDEA

'Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John [1] (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples)' [2]

Although so many had been baptized by John the Baptist, yet the Lord had His own power of attraction. Therefore huge numbers came to be baptized not by the servant (John) but by his Master (the Lord Jesus Christ). The Pharisees had imagined that matters would calm down once they got rid of the Baptist by putting him in prison. However, they find that the Lord has attracted large crowds and they are filled with jealousy.

The Lord was involved in preaching and in attracting people to believe in Him. He would then hand them over to His disciples who would baptize them. It could be that the Lord did not baptize Himself in order to prevent those baptized from boasting over others and claiming the honor of having been baptized by the Lord Himself. Other apostles, like St. Paul, left the act of baptism to others so that they could dedicate themselves to preaching (1Cor1:17). This does not indicate that they took baptism lightly, but that it was an easier task to do than that of preaching the Word and winning souls. Having said that, we need to be aware that every baptism performed in the name of the Holy Trinity is not an act done by the priest but it is the act of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself: the Lord sends His Holy Spirit to grant the baptized person the Spirit of an adopted son. The power of baptism does not depend on the righteousness of the minister performing the mystery of baptism, because the Lord alone is the One who grants the hidden mystery.

❖ Actually, it is the Lord who performs the baptism since He is the One who cleanses. He does not baptize in the sense that He is not the one who touches the bodies of those coming for baptism. The disciples performed the service of the body, while He supported them with His glory...and the Lord continues to baptize to this day, and will continue to do so as long as there is baptism. May ministers come to perform the service on earth below without fear for they have a Master in heaven. Someone may say: 'The Lord truly baptizes by the Spirit and not by the

flesh...remove the water and there would not be a baptismal font; remove the Word and there would not be baptism (Eph 5:25-27)⁷⁴.

St. Augustine

‘He left Judea and departed again to Galilee’ [3].

Galilee was under the rule of Herod who had imprisoned John the Baptist. He imagined that he could hide the light in a secure pit. He did not understand that light is more powerful than darkness, and that even though he could kill the Baptist yet the Baptist’s mission would not be crushed. By the coming of the Lord, the true Light himself had come.

When the rage of the Pharisees and their desire to kill Him was aroused, the Lord left Judea and went towards the Galilee of the Gentiles because the time of His death had not yet come (Jn 7:30). Besides, probably His disciples were not ready to bear hard trials yet. Therefore He took them with Him to Galilee. At the same time, the Lord wishes to teach us that when we are persecuted we should leave and go to another city. He went to Galilee because many people there were ready to believe in Him. They needed to meet Him and enjoy His words and acts.

If you wonder: ‘Why did the Lord go to Galilee?’ My answer is: ‘He did not leave out of fear, but rather to dismiss their jealousy. He could have controlled them if they had come to Him, but He did not want to be doing that constantly as that would have been a denial of the plan for His incarnation. If He had been caught many times and then had disappeared, many would have been suspicious of His case (as a human being). That is why He planned most of His acts to resemble to those of mankind as closely as possible. He wants us all to believe that He is God and to believe and also that He is God in the flesh. That explains why after His resurrection He told His disciples: “...Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have,” (Lk24:39). Moreover, it is for this reason that He rebuked Peter when he told Him: “Far be it from You, Lord, this shall not happen to You!” (Matt 16:22). That is how much this matter was a great concern to the Lord. Indeed, this is not a simple matter in the teachings of the Church for it represents a principal point in the salvation offered to us. Through His incarnation all matters were achieved successfully: for it is through the incarnation that the ties of death have been abolished and our lives have been granted thousands of blessings. Specifically, He wishes us to believe in the plan (of His incarnation) as the endless source and spring of blessings to us. However, while He was concerned to underline His incarnation, He did not allow His divinity to be hidden’⁷⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

The Lord gives an example to those who will believe in Him. A servant of the Lord would not be wrong if he withdraws from a situation where his opponents or persecutors are enraged or seeking to harm or kill him...for our good Lord behaved in that manner in order to teach us and not because He was afraid⁷⁶.

St. Augustine

2-THE LORD’S STAY IN SAMARIA

‘But He needed to go through Samaria’ [4]

⁷⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:3*

⁷⁵ *Homilies on St. John, 31:1-2*

⁷⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:2*

He needed to go through Samaria because it lies in the North of Judea between the Great Sea, the Galilee and the Jordan. Therefore it is impossible to cross from Jerusalem (Judea) to Galilee without going through Samaria. This journey involved three days of travel.

The **Samaritans** were of Jewish origin whether from the perspective of blood ties or of religion. When Assyria captured Israel, the poor were left in the land, so those of Jewish origin intermixed with other nationalities, and especially with those of Assyrian origin. This was planned by some Assyrian kings such as Shalmaneser (2 Kgs 17). There was also intermixing between the Jewish religion and strange and idolatry elements. The Samaritans read only the Five Books by Moses. They built a temple on Mount Gerizim to oppose the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, and considered Shechem and not Zion to be the house of God or the house of God. Moreover, they celebrated the big Jewish feasts: the Passover, the Pentecost, the Tabernacles, and the Day of Atonement. Until now, they offer a lamb or more on Mount Gerizim on the feast of the Passover.

Samaria was a fundamental part of the land of Palestine. Edraz Heim reports that this part stretched for about forty-seven miles from the North to the South, and forty miles from the East to the West. Its boundaries were marked by those of Judea in the South, by Jordan in the East, by the Valley of Charden to the West and the Valley of Jezreel (the Galilee) to the North. The tribes of Menasseh and Ephraim had captured that land; and it was one of the most beautiful and fertile areas in the region. It included the capital city of Samaria (the capital of Israel) and a few other cities.

The Lord Jesus came to plant the seed of living faith in the earth of Samaria. Its people accepted the Word as a result of their faith and not because they had seen miracles. They believed the Samaritan woman whose story the Evangelist recounts to us. It is a unique story, for the Lord meets this woman who is a Gentile in many ways, and carries on a conversation with her. He leads her away from the shameful particulars of her life and grants her the mission of evangelism. As a result, she attracts a whole city, in a very short period of time, and leads its entire people to the Savior of the world.

The Lord underlines His interest in Samaria and its people. He praises the strangely deformed Samaritan leper. In contrast to nine Jews who had been healed, he was the only one to return and thank the Lord for purifying him (Lk 17:15-18). The Lord also presented the parable of the good Samaritan whose heart was moved with practical love and so showed concern for the wounded Jew on the roadside more than the Jewish priest or the Levite (Lk 10:33-36). Just before His resurrection, the Lord charged His disciples with the responsibility to minister in Samaria: "...and you shall be witnesses for Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The Lord opened the door to Samaria and to all the Gentiles. Therefore when 'a great persecution arose against the church which was in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, ...' (Acts 8:1). This indicates that there were in Samaria some believers in the early apostolic period. St. Luke reports the ministry of Philip the apostle in the city of Samaria and says: 'And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did...And there was great joy in that city' (Acts 8:5-8).

The apostles who were in Jerusalem also sent Peter and John to the believers in Samaria in order to pray for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 'Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit' (Acts 8:14-17).

❖ The Lord did not go to Galilee without a certain intention. Rather, He went to

achieve specific important matters among the Samaritans...and according to His wisdom...He made it seem as though things had happened by coincidence during His journey. The apostles did the same thing too; for when the Jews persecuted them, they immediately left and went to the Gentiles. Similarly, when the Jews rejected the Lord, He went and met with the Samaritans and the woman from Phoenicia. It all happened so that the Jews would have no excuse and would be unable to say: 'He has abandoned us and has gone to the uncircumcised.' However, the disciples were able to find a reason for that and said: "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). When they drove Him out, they opened the door to the Gentiles. He did not go immediately to the Gentiles, but He went as He was passing by⁷⁷.

St. John Chrysostom

'So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph' [5].

Sychar: this is probably Shechem situated on the Mount of Gerizim and which is often mentioned in the Old Testament. Hoping to get united and become one nation with the children of Jacob, the inhabitants of this area had become circumcised. However, Simeon and Levi had killed them after all the males were circumcised to take revenge as Shechem had raped their sister Dinah(Gen 34:24...). In Shechem, Abimelek had reigned, and it is there that Jeroboam had set up his throne. Some believe that it was a 'military' area situated about half a mile North of Jacob's well, about ten miles from Shiloh, forty miles from Jerusalem, and Fifty three miles from Jericho. **St. Jerome** believes that the Lord went to Shechem and not Sychar. In his days, it was called Neapolis⁷⁸. Currently, the name of the city is Naplouse.

It was called **Sychar** which means 'drunken' as the inhabitants liked drinking. Isaiah the prophet accuses the people of Ephraim of this crime (Is 38:1,3.7-8) as this city was situated within their borders.

This is the information reported about this city:

- 1-It is the first city where Abraham stopped when he journeyed from Haran to Canaan.
- 2-There God appeared to Abraham for the first time and promised to give him the land as an inheritance to his descendants
- 3-There Abraham built the first altar for God and called it by His name (Gen 12:7).

Jacob bought this field from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of silver or money (Gen 33:19). Then he built an altar and called it El Elohe Israel. Jacob specifically left this field as an inheritance for Joseph and his children (Gen 48:31-32; Joshua 24:32).

❖ You might wonder: 'Why does the Evangelist present so many details about the place?' So that you do not get astonished at the words of the Samaritan woman; for it was here that the anger of Levi and Simeon was kindled on account of Dinah. They engaged in a violent slaughter...The Samaritans did not read all the Old Testament and accepted only the Books written by Moses and a small number of Books written by the prophets. Nevertheless, they were eager to inject and impose themselves into the honorable Jewish ancestry. In this way, they could boast and claim Abraham to be

⁷⁷ *Homilies on St. John, 31:2*

⁷⁸ *Letter 108:13*

their father especially since they were of Chaldean origin too. They also called Jacob their father since he was Abraham's descent. As for the Jews, they despised the Samaritans as much as they despised the rest of the Gentiles. That is why they reproached the Lord and told Him: "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (Jn 8:48)⁷⁹.

St. John Chrysostom

'Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied, from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.' [6]

The Old Testament makes no mention of this well. But according to tradition handed down to the Samaritans, this well had been dug or used by Jacob and therefore got named as Jacob's well. Later on it became open for public use.

The Greek word *houtoos* is used to indicate that the act of sitting did not take place on a throne or a couch but on the ground, and on the stones scattered near the well.

About the sixth hour- that is around noon time, the Lord felt tired because He had walked in the heat of the day. Just like a normal human being, He was subject to physical weakness and got tired. He humbly traveled on foot, and He did not own a boat or an animal that He could ride. Because He had a fragile body, He could not tolerate walking in the heat; whereas his disciples did not have any problem. They went into the city and bought food. It is not strange to know that the Lord got tired and thirsty at noon time. The disciples had left Him- this brings to mind the scene of the Lord on Mount Calvary or Golgotha where He hung on the Cross at noontime. He was carrying our burdens and revealed His thirst for every human soul. There, too, His disciples forsook Him and ran away, and left Him to pass through the wine press alone.

❖ The Lord came to that place by avoiding the life of comfort. He took the wearisome path and struggled as He did not use any donkey on this journey. Indeed, He walked so much that He got tired during His journey. On every occasion, the Lord teaches us this lesson: to struggle in our effort to get our necessities without searching for luxuries. That is why He says: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matt 8:20). Besides, He spent most of His time in the mountains and desert at night as well as during the day for that same reason. David speaks about that when he says: 'He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; therefore he shall lift up the head' (Ps 110:7). This foretells the hard way of life that the Lord would lead⁸⁰.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ If you wish to find the Lord, abandon the broken basins, for the Lord usually sits by a well rather than by a pool.

The Samaritan woman found Him there. She is the one who wanted to believe. Because she needed to draw water, she had to go in the early morning. But she did not go until the sixth hour when she found the Lord tired from His journey.

He is tired because of you for He has been looking for you for so long. Your lack of faith has worn Him out. Yet, in spite of that, when you come He will not say one word of reproach.

He asks you to give Him to drink while He is the Giver of all things. Yet He is nourished (and drinks) by Your redemption and not from an overflowing stream. He

⁷⁹ *Homilies on St. John, 31:2*

⁸⁰ *Homilies on St. John, 31:3*

drinks from your good deeds, and He drinks the cup or the suffering through which He will redeem your sins. Consequently, we quench the thirst of this world when we drink of His holy Blood.

It is in this manner that Abraham enjoyed God after he had dug a well (Gen 21:30). Isaac met his wife as he walked by a well (Gen. 24:64) and she walked towards him as a symbol of the Church...Rebekah found the one looking for her at the well; and the harlots washed themselves in the water of the pool from the blood (1 Kgs 22:38)⁸¹.

St. Ambrose

❖ The power of the Lord Jesus Christ created you and His weakness (or fatigue) renews your being. The power of the Lord brought you into being out of nothing and His weakness reversed the sentence on that which was expedient to destroy so that it would not be annihilated. He has created us by His power and He has restored us by His weakness⁸².

❖ In the form of a weak person, He feeds and satisfies the weak in the same manner that a hen does with her chicken. Indeed, He likens Himself to a hen when He speaks of Jerusalem and says: “O Jerusalem...how often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matt 23:37). Dear fellow men, you are aware how weak the mother hen becomes with her chicks. None other among the birds know how to do that when they become mothers...for her wings droop, her feathers shed, her voice breaks, and all her members become weak and thin. You can tell that she is a mother even if her chicks are not around her.

In the same manner, the Lord Jesus Christ is weak and fatigued from His journey. His body represents the journey that He had taken for our sakes. How could it be otherwise as He journeyed everywhere, while He is never absent and (omnipresent) in every place?...

The Lord is physically weak so that you would not become weak. Indeed, you become strong through His weakness for the ‘weakness of God is stronger than men’⁸³.

❖ The woman was created from the rib and so seemed to be strong, while Adam seemed weak as he was created from dust. This is the Lord and His Church: His weakness is our strength⁸⁴.

❖ Why is the sixth hour so meaningful? It is because in the Bible every period is viewed as an hour. So the first period covers from Adam to Noah, the second from Noah to Abraham, the third from Abraham to David, the fourth from David to the exile in Babylon, the fifth from the exile in Babylon to the baptism of John, and from that time the sixth period begins⁸⁵.

St. Augustine

❖ ‘Jesus...sat thus’, what does the Evangelist mean by ‘thus’? That is He did not sit on a throne, or a pillow; but that He simply sat on the ground⁸⁶.

St. John Chrysostom

⁸¹ *Of the Holy Spirit 1:16:184-185*

⁸² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:4*

⁸³ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:7*

⁸⁴ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:8*

⁸⁵ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:9*

⁸⁶ *Homilies on St. John, 31:3*

3-THE CONVERSATION WITH THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

‘A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her: “Give Me a drink” [7].

That the woman came at noon after the men and women had drawn water and had returned to their homes reveals the way her people regarded her. She could not bring herself to face any of them. So she came alone and in the heat of the day to draw water. Our Lord is the God of those who are banished and forsaken. He fashions and transforms them into children of His kingdom and preachers of the truth.

It is clear that this Samaritan woman was poor since she did not have a servant to draw water from the well for her. She was a fighter who went herself to the well to draw water.

This meeting reminds us of Rebecca, Rachel, and the daughter of Jethro. Through meetings at the well, they were blessed in their marriages to Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. In the same way, the Samaritan woman found the Bridegroom of her soul at Jacob’s well. We too find our Messiah and Bridegroom in the baptismal font.

The Lord began His conversation with her by a humble request: to have a drink of water. The One who had become poor for our sake has now become a beggar, for our sake too. He asks for a glass of water not out of His personal need but in order to reveal her own need for Him. Then she would drink and be satisfied from the springs of His rich blessings and grace.

❖ What does ‘Give Me a drink’ imply? It implies: ‘I am yearning for you to believe’⁸⁷.

❖ The One who asked for a drink was thirsty and sought to offer faith and salvation to the woman herself⁸⁸.

St. Augustine

❖ Here we learn about the Lord’s struggle during His journey and His disregard for food which He considered of little importance. His disciples learned to behave in the same manner for they were to take no provisions when they traveled. Another evangelist reveals the same principal when he reports the Lord’s words to His disciples about the ‘leaven of the Pharisees’ (Matt 6:16). They thought He was saying these words because they had no bread. Another instance is when the disciples are reported to be in the fields cutting and eating the corn ears (Matt 12:1). The Gospel also tells that when the Lord came to the fig tree He was hungry (Matt 21:18). All this is mentioned just to teach us not to worry or be anxious about matters belonging to the stomach and its needs⁸⁹.

St. John Chrysostom

‘For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food’ [8].

❖ In this situation, not only is the Lord’s fatigue revealed but also His lack of pride. This is evident not only as He is tired and sits on the side of the road; but also as He is left alone and the disciples abandon Him while - if He had wanted- He could have kept a few to serve Him and sent only a some away into the city. But He did not want that as He intended to teach His disciples to get accustomed to trampling their pride. Is there any wonder that they were moderate in their needs since they were fishermen

⁸⁷ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 49:3*

⁸⁸ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:11*

⁸⁹ *Homilies on St. John, 31:3*

and tent makers? It is true that these were their occupations; yet in a moment they had been raised to the highest heaven and they were invested with greater honor than all earthly kings. They had been found worthy to have fellowship with the Lord of the world, and to follow the One to whom all look and tremble. However, you know well that specifically those who come from low origins become puffed up when they are easily granted a privilege. They are stupid for they do not know how to contain the honor they have suddenly received. Therefore to preserve their actual humility, the Lord constantly taught them to be moderate and not to expect that anyone would welcome them (with honor)⁹⁰.

St. John Chrysostom

While the disciples were in the city buying food, the Lord seized the opportunity to speak with the Samaritan woman and to draw her, and the people of the city to their salvation. To do the will of the Father is His true food (bread) which consists of the redemption of souls.

Our Messiah who is concerned with speaking with the crowds is also concerned with meeting one individual, a poor woman who is of a strange origin and a Samaritan who bears enmity towards the Jews.

❖ They went to buy food as they acted differently from us. When we wake up, we devote our attention to food before all other concerns. Therefore we call on the cooks, food experts, or servers and recommend carefully that they upgrade and prepare our food. After that we go about our daily occupations and these have priority over our spiritual concerns. But we should really do the opposite of that: first we ought to give priority and handle our spiritual duties as they should be of greater importance. Next, we would be ready to handle our daily tasks.

St. John Chrysostom

‘Then the woman of Samaria said to Him: “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans’ [9].

The Samaritan woman recognizes that the Lord is a Jew either from His clothes which are different from the Samaritans’ or from His accent. What preoccupies her is not to answer His request or reject it, but the tone of His voice. He did not sound like a Jew with hostile feelings. The Samaritans too were known to be hostile to the Jews (Ezra 4:1). She knows how much the Jews hate and resent the Samaritans. The Jews believed that Samaritans have no right to the resurrection from the dead, they are cursed, and are denied to be one with God’s people. It was not right for a Jew to eat of a Samaritan’s food or that would defile him/her and the same applied for those who would eat pigs. However, the Lord Jesus Christ disregards this enmity since His primary concern is to attract the soul and therefore enjoy His salvation.

The Samaritan woman is astonished at the Lord’s attitude for it was unthinkable for a Jew to ask anything whatsoever from a Samaritan; and there was no exception- no matter the degree of need or hardship. She was also astonished that He would expect her to respond to His request due to the fact that Samaritans were hostile to the Jews. No transactions took place between the Jews and the Samaritans therefore they had no dealings in the domains of worship or commerce. It was forbidden to borrow vessels from a Samaritan or to share the same meal together.

❖ What signs led her to suspect that He is a Jew? Probably from His clothes as well

⁹⁰*Homilies on St. John, 31:3*

as from the accent of His speech.

Notice how courteous the Samaritan woman is. She does not say that Samaritans do not deal with the Jews; but she wonders **‘For the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans’**⁹¹.

St. John Chrysostom

She got to know the Lord gradually through His conversation and His gradual revelations:

- At the beginning of His conversation, she thought Him to be a Jew who would not deal with Samaritans [9]
- She called Him ‘Sir’ [11]
- She conceived Him to be greater than Jacob the father of all the tribes [12]
- She believed that He is the Giver of the living water [15]
- She believed that He is a prophet [19]
- She expected Him to be the awaited Messiah [25], therefore He said to her: I who speak to you am He” [26]

‘Jesus answered and said to her: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, ‘Give Me a drink’, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” [10]

The Lord Jesus Christ draws that woman to the path of salvation. He does so by attracting her thoughts away from the preoccupation with the hostility existing between the two parties and leading her to the depths of her soul. Consequently, she thirsts for the living water, and realizes her need for the Savior. In this way, he does not attack the manner of worship in Samaria which is a divided and distorted concept of faith and worship. It is not a time for conflict; but a time for a calm meeting with the soul and the enjoyment of God’s free blessings. For the time has come for God to visit the whole world by sending the redeeming Messiah. The Lord yearns that we know Him, call Him, and attain Him and ultimately satisfy our thirst from Him forever!

What she needs is true knowledge: **“If you knew the gift of God”, “...and who it is that says to you....”** She needs to know the gift of God to her, and to realize who is the One speaking to her for He is the greatest Gift! He is the treasure of God’s sublime love, the One who quenches the thirsty soul. This is not a loan and a debt we need to repay; but it is a free gift that the Father is glad to offer to mankind.

She does not comprehend the Gift of God or that He has sent His only Son to offer Himself on behalf of the world (Jn 3:16). She also does not know about the gift of the Holy Spirit that flows into the soul as a river satisfying it and overflowing to others. Neither does she know that the Spirit offers other unlimited spiritual talents sanctified for the redemption of the world. These are free divine gifts that God offers to initiate His love towards us even while we were still enemies. These gifts will continue to be a source granting us divine knowledge even in eternal life: ‘And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb...’ (Rev 22:1).

❖ The gift of God is the Holy Spirit. However, until this moment, the Lord is speaking to the woman cautiously and entering (winning) her heart gradually⁹².

⁹¹ *Homilies on St. John, 31:4*

⁹² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:12*

St. Augustine

‘Living water’ is a common expression to indicate the sources of water that flow continuously. This is the opposite of ‘dead water’ that refers to stagnant water found in ponds, marches, and water tanks where it is exposed to pollution. Living water refers to the Holy Spirit that waters the soul and transforms its bareness into a fruitful paradise. At the same time the Spirit washes the soul from her corruption.

❖ The Lord here reveals that the woman deserves to hear the Word rather than someone to be rejected. Having revealed Himself to her, she instantly listens to Him for she learns who He is. This is something that cannot be said about the Jews; for when they learned they no longer asked Him or even wished to benefit in any way from Him. Moreover, they insulted and expelled Him⁹³.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ This is the water that David thirsted for, just as the deer ‘pants for the water brooks’ (Ps 42:1) rather than thirsting for the poison of snakes. This is because the water granted by the grace of the Holy Spirit is living water. It purifies the inner parts of the mind and washes away every sin of the soul while removing the resistance of hidden sins⁹⁴.

St. Ambrose

“...you would have asked...”: true knowledge would motivate us to pray and ask. On His part, God is ready to respond by granting our request. However, He waits until we reveal our desire to receive, and to ask so that we can receive.

“The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?”[11]

Maundiell notes that the depth of the well is approximately 35 yards⁹⁵. To draw water one would need a bucket and a long rope. Neither the Lord nor His disciples had any of these. It seemed to the woman that the Lord’s words were illogical. That is because He spoke of spiritual matters, whereas she was thinking in materialistic terms. In spite of that, she felt obliged to respect and honor Him due to the tone of His words. As a result she started to address him as **‘Sir.’**

The Samaritan woman took pride in the well that had been dug by a human hand; yet she was not aware that she stood before the divine and living Source. In the past, God had reproached His people saying: “For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn for themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (Jer. 2:13).

❖ Note how the woman answers the Lord elaborately and says: **“Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?”** Clearly, she must have had a reason for addressing Him in this manner and for greatly honoring Him. The proof is that she did not laugh, but was surprisingly confused. Do not be astonished that she could not understand immediately what she should have grasped concerning the Lord, for even Nicodemus did not understand the words of the Lord.

Contemplate the words of Nicodemus: “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter into his mother’s womb and be born?” In contrast, this woman is more respectful than Nicodemus She could have said something antagonistic such as: ‘If

⁹³ *Homilies on St. John, 31:4*

⁹⁴ *Of the Holy Spirit 1:16:175*

⁹⁵ *Adam Clarke Comm.*

You possessed living water, You would not have asked water from me. You would first give it to Yourself. Now, you are just boasting.’ Actually she said: **“Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?”** So she did not say a single objectionable word but rather answered very humbly from the beginning of the conversation.

St. John Chrysostom

“Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?” [12]

The Samaritans considered themselves to be Jacob’s children since they were one of the ten tribes who had been separated in the days of Jeroboam. However, as we know, they carried foreign blood as they mixed with different Gentile nations.

❖ It is as though the Samaritan woman is saying to the Lord: ‘Our father Jacob has given us this well and he has not used any other. He and all his descendants drank out of it. They would not have done so if they had a better one. Therefore You cannot provide a better well or better water, and You cannot possess a better well than this one. So from where do You possess the water that You promise to give us unless You proclaim that you are greater than Jacob our father?’

St. John Chrysostom

It is right for the Samaritan woman to take pride in the well of her father Jacob. However, she does not know how to pass through it to the God of Jacob who is the Giver of the living water. It was necessary for her to soar with her father Jacob to have a vision of Jacob’s ladder that ascended from his head into the heavens. She would then have rejoiced because of the Cross that opens the gates of heaven to the whole world! It is also good that she discusses the subject of worship to God: will it be on the Mount at Jerusalem or at Gerizim? Together with the saints of the Old Testament, she needed to cross over to that which is beyond the mountains in order to enjoy worshipping God in spirit and in truth. She appears to be really great when she senses that He is the Messiah that generations have been awaiting and Who would tell them all things. Therefore she becomes qualified to hear Him proclaim to her: **“I who speak to you am He.”** She has reached the summit of divine proclamation from the Savior Himself and so has surpassed many others.

“Jesus answered and said to her: “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again” [13]

❖ He did not answer: ‘Yes, I am greater than Jacob’, but rather achieved His purpose through His conversation with her...He wished to clarify matters to her, and explain the degree of difference and lack of correspondence between the two persons⁹⁶.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The water in the dark depths of the well represents worldly pleasures. Mankind draws out of this using the utensils of lust...consider lust as the bucket, and worldly pleasures as the water drawn from the depth of the well. When a person gets to taste worldly pleasures which take the form of food, clothes, grandeur, and weapons, how can he possibly not thirst again?⁹⁷

St. Ambrose

⁹⁶ *Hom. On John, 32:1*

⁹⁷ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate15:16*

“...but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life” [14]

The Lord does not reproach her for thinking that Jacob was greater than Him, or that the water of the well is better than living water. On the contrary, He begins, most gently, to inform her about the living water. He compares it with the water in Jacob’s well; and He underlines that there can be no comparison between water that satisfies the body for a while and water that satisfies and supports the soul forever, leaving it to want nothing else.

The water that the Lord offers has distinct benefits:

- It is a divine gift: **‘I shall give him...’** and so it grants divine joy: ‘Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation’ (Is. 12:3).
- It grants eternal life that cancels all other needs for he **‘will never thirst’**, and ‘He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst’ (Jn. 6:35).
- It is inner water for the soul that **‘will become in him a fountain.’** Therefore the Giver of the living water woos the soul and says: ‘A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed’ (Sg. of Sol. 4: 12).
- The depths are transformed into **a source that overflows onto others:** “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’ (Jn 7:38).

The Lord calls the Spirit ‘fire’ to indicate the grace that energizes and purifies; for the Spirit is able to obliterate sins and purge the soul. Besides, when He speaks of the Spirit as ‘water’, He proclaims that the Spirit has the power to clean and remove dirt; and indicates the great refreshment He promotes in the minds of those who accept Him.

The prophets yearned for this living water when they heard the invitation extended to all: “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...” (Is. 55:1). And also: “They shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them, for He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them...” (Is. 49:10). Also according to the saying in the Book of the Revelation: “They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters” (Rev. 7: 16-17).

❖ This is a reference to the redeeming water of baptism which has been truly offered once and will not be repeated again⁹⁸.

St. Cyprian

❖ The Holy Bible refers to the Holy Spirit sometimes as ‘fire’ and at other times as ‘water.’ This is to indicate that these words describe the work of the Holy Spirit rather than His essence; for He is intangible and cannot be seen as a combination or a composition of different elements. John (the Baptist) declares that: “...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire...” (Lk 2:16). As for the other John (the Evangelist), he reports the words of the Lord Jesus Christ as follows: “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living

⁹⁸ EP. 62 to Coecillius.

water' (Jn 7:38). He says this about the Holy Spirit who would be received by believers. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, the Lord calls the Spirit 'water' for "**whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst**"⁹⁹. The woman had heard this expression before: '**the living water**' but had not understood its meaning. Therefore the Lord explains the meaning in the best way by saying: "**...but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst...**" since this water is far more sublime than any water. It is like someone who possesses a well in his own house and therefore would not suffer of thirst at any time. Similarly the person who possesses this water will not thirst at any moment of life with Him.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The Lord clarifies that this well is the gift of the Holy Spirit, a spring that flows from a living Source. The Holy Spirit is a Source of eternal life as well... This living water is great, for it is the gift of the Holy Spirit...may it flow within me, may this that gives eternal life flow in and over me. May the Source flow on us and not far away from us; for wisdom says: "Drink water from your own cisterns, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets?" (read Prov. 5:16-17). How can I protect my pots from suffering the cracks caused by sin, and avoid the leaking of the waters of eternal life? Teach us, O Lord, teach us as You have taught Your apostles saying: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal"¹⁰⁰.

St. Ambrose

❖ When the promise is fulfilled to a blessed person because he hungers and thirsts for righteousness (Matt 5:6); he drinks of the water that the Lord gives to him and he possesses a source of water within him that flows into everlasting life¹⁰¹.
❖ It is worthy to note that the promise of water was not given to the Samaritan woman when she asked for it. It seems that the Lord wished to offer it in no other way but from the Source, so He tells her: "Go, call your husband, and come here" [16]¹⁰²

Origen

Origen devoted his energy and skills to study, interpret, and enjoy the Holy Bible from a very early age. He made a distinction between the waters of the Holy Bible and those which the Lord of glory offers. The Bible provides a wealth of divine mysteries that flow into the soul so we may enjoy fellowship with the Holy Trinity. However, the Lord Jesus Christ retains some mysteries which He offers secretly to the soul that is united to Him. He is the heavenly Bridegroom who overflows onto His bride with His mysteries within the wedding circle.

❖ Indeed, the Holy Bible does not contain some aspects of the divine mysteries. These aspects most probably have to do with His Lordship and divinity; and are not communicated through a human voice or tongue. This is implied by the following words: 'And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were

⁹⁹ *Hom. On John, 32:1*

¹⁰⁰ *Of the Holy Spirit 1:16:181-182*

¹⁰¹ *Commentary on John, Book 13:20*

¹⁰² *Commentary on John, Book 13:25*

written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written' (Jn 21:25).

St. John was forbidden to write when he started to record what the seven thunders said (Rev 10:4). St. Paul also tells us that he heard words that were impossible to utter (2Cor. 12:4). No one has been allowed to pronounce these words or messages...

I think that all the holy Books, even when fully comprehended, are just a preface to the principles and a brief introduction to all knowledge ...the waters offered by the Lord Jesus Christ are those that surpass all that which is written (1Cor. 4:6).

At the present time, it is not allowed to examine the matters that are beyond what is written (1Cor 4:6)... 'Don't try to understand things that are too hard for you, or investigate matters that are beyond your power to know' (read Sirach 3:21)...

Moreover, matters that have not entered the heart of man are greater than Jacob's well. These matters are revealed from the Source of water that flows into eternal life for those who do not possess any longer a human heart, but rather are able to proclaim: "...we have the mind of Christ" (1Cor 2:16); for "...we know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches" (1Cor. 2:12-13)... In this light, the holy Books are just introductions and can be called Jacob's well. Once they are comprehended, a person should speedily ascend out of them and go to the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he would enjoy the wealth of the Source that flows into eternal life.

Not everyone draws water from Jacob's well in the same manner Jacob, his children, and his livestock drank out of it (Jn. 4:12). That explains why the Samaritan woman come to it and drank but was thirsty. Probably Jacob and his children drank in a certain way and with full knowledge, whereas his livestock drank in a different manner and in the simplicity of such animals. The Samaritan woman drank too but in a different manner other than Jacob or his sons and livestock. Similarly, some are wise and drink out of the holy Books in the same manner as Jacob and his children. Others are more simple and innocent and are known as Christ's 'sheep' (Jn. 10:26).and they drink in the same manner as Jacob's livestock. While there are others who misunderstand the holy Books and use inappropriate means to interpret them in the light of texts they have understood out of them. These drink in the same manner as the Samaritan woman before she came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ¹⁰³.

Origen

❖ There is living water that says within me: "Come to the Father"¹⁰⁴.

St. Ignatius of Antioch

❖ Since our nature has deteriorated and become as hard as stone due to the worship of idols, and has become frozen in the cold of atheism and unable to progress; therefore the Sun of Righteousness arose (Mal. 4:2). In this bitter cold, the coming of the spring appeared, and the warm southern winds erased all traces of the cold; while the shining rays of the Sun brought warmth to the whole world. Consequently, the human race that had turned into stone on account of the cold, became embraced by the warmth through the Holy Spirit who is the rays of the word of God. It is in this manner that the Holy Spirit once more becomes like the water that grants eternal life (Jn,

¹⁰³ *Commentary on John, Book 13:27-39*

¹⁰⁴ *Romans 7:2*

4:14)... ‘Who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters (Ps 114:8)¹⁰⁵.

St. Gregory of Nicea

‘The woman said to Him: “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw” [15]

❖ When the Lord tells the woman: “...**the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life**”, the woman responds immediately: **“Sir, give me this water.”** Do you see how the woman ascends gradually to higher knowledge? At first she thinks the Lord is a Jewish person who has deviated from his tradition...When she hears Him speak of **‘living water’** [14], she thinks that He is referring to tangible water and believes that this water could dismiss thirst. So far she has no concept of the nature of this water. Besides, she is confused as she thought it had more potential than the water she was familiar with. That is why she says **“...give me this water; that I may not thirst again, nor come here to draw.”**

Have you noticed how the woman prefers the Lord over the leader of the fathers? Having indicated her opinion of Jacob and the degree of his greatness, she has come to know the One who is better than him.

❖ At this point she gets to possess a clearer insight. However, she has not yet comprehended the whole picture; for she says: **“...give me this water; that I may not thirst again, nor come here to draw” [15]**. Here she reveals that she prefers Him over Jacob...for it is as though her inner self is saying: ‘I will no longer need this well since I will receive water from You...’ After she had revealed her respect for Jacob, she has now met the One better than Him... her former thoughts, in this manner, did not impede her...and there was no rebellious argument¹⁰⁶.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Indeed, it now becomes clearly apparent that the Lord’s words are sincere: **“...you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” [10]**. For when she says **“...give me this water...” [15]**, she receives the living water. From now on she will never have a sense of loss when she gets thirsty; just as she will not need to come to Jacob’s well to draw water.

She can now meditate on the Truth while she is away from Jacob’s water. She will do so in a manner that transcends mankind and is angelic since angels do not need to drink out of Jacob’s well.

Every angel possesses an internal source of water flowing into eternal life. This source is provided by the Word and proclaimed by it and by Wisdom herself. There is no hope for a person who is not preoccupied with struggling to come to Jacob’s well and draw water out due to his thirst. Such a person cannot receive the water granted by the Word and which differs from Jacob’s well. That explains why many people are extremely handicapped since they are unable to train themselves for long periods in drawing water out of Jacob’s well¹⁰⁷.

Origen

¹⁰⁵ Sg of Solomon : St. Gregory of Nicea: translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 5

¹⁰⁶ Hom. On John,32

¹⁰⁷ Commentary on John, Book 13:41-42

‘Jesus said to her: “Go, call your husband, and come here” [16]

In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, the Lord Jesus Christ moves on from the topic of the water to that of the woman’s marital life. Now that she has learned that she was in need of a new kind of water that could refresh and grant her eternal life, she feels the need for a bridegroom for her soul. To do that, she needs to re-evaluate her marital life.

Without hurting her feelings, the Lord reveals his insight into her heart and His knowledge of her all her family secrets. His intention is to encourage her to recognize her sins and her need to repent.

‘The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband’...” [17]

What a skilful divine healer! He uncovers the infirmity in the woman, and with His divine blade, begins to attack the body with skill, power and love. This leads her to confess what no other woman would pronounce: ‘I have no husband.’ Her confession is not the result of hurtful reproaching or of facing her with her shameful self. It is the result of His love. This arouses her conscience, and reveals to her the reality of the Lord. Consequently, she becomes trustful and admits the truth about her personal life as she gets to realize that He can heal her wounds and restore her spiritual health.

❖ We have mentioned earlier that the law controls the soul; that everyone one submits himself to it; and that in the case of marriage the husband represents the law. To support this, we will quote from the apostle who writes to the Romans and says: “Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives...,” (Romans 7:1-2). So the husband impersonates the law as long as he lives. However, once he dies, she no longer is obligated to fulfill the duties a wife has towards her husband. The apostle, in this context says: “But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband...” Now that the law is dead in its literal sense, the soul is no longer considered adulterous if it gives itself to another man: in other words, the soul can now associate itself with the law according to the spirit. It is possible to say that the wife has died also since she leaves her dead husband- once a man dies and leaves his wife. We understand this statement through logical deduction as follows: “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God” (Romans 7:4).

Therefore if the husband represents the law, and the Samaritan woman has a husband, then she has subjugated herself to some strange law based on a misunderstanding of the correct law. It is a fabricated law that is embraced by those who wish to live by it. In such a situation the divine Word requires the fabricating soul to uncover its shame by confessing the law that controls it. As the woman faces and despises herself because she does not belong legally to any husband, she looks for another bridegroom. The Lord wishes her to belong to another one: to the Word who has been raised from the dead, who will not be conquered or destroyed, but will endure for ever (Is. 40:8; 1Peter 1:25); and who controls and dominates all His enemies (Ps 8:7; Eph.1:22). This is because ‘...Christ having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death has no longer dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life that He lives He lives to God’ (Romans 6:9-10). He sits at the right hand of God (Heb 10:12), and all His enemies are subjugated under His feet (Ps110:1). That is why the Lord tells her: **“Go, call your husband...”** By replying:

“I have no husband” [17], she convicts herself on account of her wrongful association with a man who is not her husband in such a manner¹⁰⁸.

Origen

“...for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly” [18]

In an amazingly gentle way, the Lord does not hurt her feelings on account of the fact that she had married five times previously and now lives with a man who is not her husband. Besides, He changes the conversation from being an argument about disagreements between the Jews and the Samaritans to a discussion about the new worship that would embrace the whole world. This would offer joy to the believer wherever he may be living.

St. Jerome comments that in order to meet the Savior of the world our Lord Jesus Christ, it is appropriate to abandon the five men- who stand for the Books written by Moses; as well as the sixth man- who stands for inventors or heretics¹⁰⁹.

St. Augustine makes the following comment about this woman who has married five men and is living with a man who is not her husband: The five husbands represent the five senses since she has surrendered her soul to her physical senses. These could not satisfy her as they do not lead her soul to eternal life. They just satisfy temporary and short lived feelings. The one with whom she is living now, and who is not her husband, represents the mind (that is not sanctified) and that does not lead her to the Word and the Truth. Rather, it leads her to sin, and offers her incorrect knowledge. She needs the Bridegroom of her soul who will lead her to wisdom, truth, and fulfillment.

❖ How great is this woman’s wisdom, and how humbly does she accept the Lord’s reproach...it is noteworthy to mention two points about this reproach: the Lord mentions the number of her previous husbands, and reproaches her about the one with whom she now lives although she tried to conceal this matter. So how does she react? She shows no sign of annoyance, she does not leave and run away, nor does she consider His words humiliating. On the contrary, she expresses her admiration and her respect for Him increased as she says: **“Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.”** Notice her composure for she does not rush hastily, but she reveals respect and admiration as she says: **“I perceive...”**- that is ‘I see...’ **“...that You are a prophet”¹¹⁰**.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ I think that every soul that embraces the Christian religion does so through the reading of the Holy Books. She begins by taking in matters that can be comprehended through the senses and are known as physical matters. These have five husbands- one for every sense. However, after the soul keeps company with matters that are comprehended by the senses, it desires later on to transcend above them and rush towards matters comprehended by the spirit. At this point, the soul collides with corrupt teachings based on symbolic spiritual meanings. Consequently, she draws near to another husband, other than the five to whom she sends divorce documents. It is as though she has decided to live with that sixth one...’ We too live with that sixth husband until the Lord Jesus Christ arrives and enables us to discover the character of such a husband. When the Word of the Lord arrives and enters into a conversation

¹⁰⁸ *Commentary on John, Book 13:43-50*

¹⁰⁹ *Letter 108:13*

¹¹⁰ *Hom. on John, 32. To read: the Samaritan Woman by St. John the Beloved’s Publishing House, Cairo*

with us, we reject that husband and say: **“I have no husband”**; and then the Lord will respond saying: **“You have well said, ‘I have no husband’ [17]**¹¹¹

Origen

❖ When the Samaritan woman mentioned in the Gospel admits that the man living with her is the sixth one, the Lord reproaches her as he was not her husband. As far as I am concerned, I feel free to announce once more that the second marriage is ‘digamy’ and is not encouraged by the Church, and even the third marriage ‘trigamy’ is rejected. A woman may marry for a fourth time...or for more times as long as it is a legal marriage...yet although a second marriage is not forbidden, it is not recommended... for “ All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful” (1 Cor 6:12)¹¹².

St. Jerome

“The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet” [19]

As the Lord reveals Himself gradually to her, the woman discovers that He knows all her hidden secrets. According to her understanding, this means that He is a prophet and so she trusts in His ability to answer truthfully the question that puzzles so many: ‘Will true worship take place in Jerusalem as the Jews claim, or will it be on Mount Gerizim according to the Samaritans and which had been blessed?’ Some believe it is the same mountain upon which Abraham and later Jacob had built the altar (Genesis 12:6-7; 33:18-20).

The Samaritans had handed the altar over that was built by Sanballat (332BC) to Antiochus Epiphanus and asked him to dedicate it to Jupiter Olympius. They had also denied they had any relationship with the Jews in order to escape the bitter sufferings that Antiochus poured imposed upon them.

That is how the conversation took a turn and became about the subject of worship: ‘will it be in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim?’

❖ What an amazing situation, and what great philosophy this woman appears to possess! Note how she accepts the Lord’s reproach in a most pure manner when He uncovers her hidden act. She has no problem with that and she neither leaves nor runs away. Indeed, her amazement increases as she says to Him: **“I perceive that You are a prophet.”**

❖ Reflect on the fair judgment of this woman who bases her decision on the actual facts, whether these have to do with our father Jacob or with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews did not react in this manner, for when they saw Him drive out devils they said ‘He has a devil’; and they did not conclude that He is greater than Jacob, the father of all tribes¹¹³.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The husband is on His way, but he has not come completely...she has begun to invite the husband and to dismiss her illicit lover¹¹⁴.

St. Augustine

Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship: [20]

¹¹¹ *Commentary on St. John, Book 13:51*

¹¹² *Commentary on St. John, Book 13:52*

¹¹³ *Hom. On John, 32.*

¹¹⁴ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:23*

According to the Samaritans, Mount Gerizim is sacred and people should worship God there. It is the mountain with the well right on top of its slope. It is said that Abraham built an altar here, and also where he met Melchizedek who blessed him. On this mountain, Moses the prophet was commanded to bless the people when they crossed the Jordan. This is where Simeon, Levi, Judah, Isaachar, Joseph and Benjamin had stood; while Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali stood on Mount Ebal when the curse on idol worship was pronounced to all the men of Israel (Deut 27:11-13). From a different perspective, the Jews considered Zion to be the place where God resides and that it was chosen by the father of all people. Therefore they built the Temple there and the Levite priests and people worshipped in this place. ❖ When she believed the Lord to be a prophet, she did not make a worldly request; or ask for physical health, possessions, or wealth. She was concerned with religious matters [20]¹¹⁵.

❖ Do you note how the woman becomes more insistent in her search for understanding? She is the same person as the one who was concerned about her thirst. She did not want this to trouble her anymore; and now she asks Him about religious matters.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ If God were flesh, it would be correct to worship Him on a mountain which is a material substance. It would also be correct to worship him in a temple¹¹⁶.

❖ What an amazing matter! He lives on high and He is close to the humble. He sees the humble, but ‘the proud He knows from afar’ (Ps 138:6)...

Therefore do you ask for a mountain? Come down so that you may draw close to Him.

Should you ascend? Yes, ascend, but do not ask for a mountain. It is said: “Whose heart is set on pilgrimage as they pass through the valley of Baca (84:6). The valley represents humility. May you apply all that within your heart.

Even when you wish to seek for an elevated place, a holy place, have an altar within you for ‘the temple of God is holy, which temple you are’ (1Cor 3:17).

Do you wish to pray in a temple? If you begin by being the temple of God, then the mountain is within you; for He listens to those who pray in His temple¹¹⁷.

St. Augustine

‘Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father...”’ [21]

The hour has come when the Son of Man has descended in order to lift mankind away from the letter to the spirit. What should preoccupy believers is not the place but their status as children of the heavenly Father.

❖ The sincere and dedicated person is able to overcome even such an obstacle of location since he worships the Lord in a deeper meditative and divine manner. Just as the angels do not worship God in Jerusalem (even the Jews agree about that), so it is for those who are equal to the angels; for they worship Him in a better manner than those who worship in Jerusalem (Lk 20:36). They intend on worshipping the Father in a better manner and not in Jerusalem¹¹⁸.

Origen

¹¹⁵ *Hom. on John, 32:2. To read: the Samaritan Woman by St. John the Beloved's Publishing House, Cairo*

¹¹⁶ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:24*

¹¹⁷ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:25*

¹¹⁸ *Commentary on John, Book 13:98-99*

❖ He does not show preference to any place, but focuses on one's intentions¹¹⁹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ This saying was true about the Jews. However, it did not apply to all of them. It did not apply to the Jews who had rejected the faith; but it applied to those who had acted like the apostles and the prophets. It applied to all of those saints who had sold their possessions, and had placed the money at the feet of the disciples; for "God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew" (Romans 11:2)¹²⁰.

❖ It is as though she is saying: 'The Jews struggle on account of the temple, and we on account of this mountain, but when the (Messiah) will come, He will despise the mountain and discard the temple. He will teach us everything so we will learn how to worship in the spirit and in truth.' She has recognized the One who is able to teach her; but she has not realized as yet that He is teaching her at this very moment. Now she has become qualified to enjoy discovering Him¹²¹.

St. Augustine

"You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation comes of the Jews..." [22]

By saying: "...what you do not know..." the Lord indicates the Prophetic Books which the Samaritans had rejected. These Books prepare the way of knowledge and establish the person of the redeeming Messiah. The words: "...we worship what we know..." refer to the divine Books as a safe path to true knowledge and worship. The Lord Jesus Christ includes Himself among the crowd of worshippers since He has humbly become the Son of Man.

The only Son of Man is not ashamed to proclaim His obedience, genuflection, and worship to the Father; while there are many human beings who arrogantly belittle worship and consider it a waste of time.

"...for salvation comes of the Jews...": eternal salvation came from the Jews (Rom. 9:5) and it was first offered to them. The divine teachings were delivered to them (Rom. 3:2); as well as the ministry to God (Rom 9:4). The Messiah was born of them and they were the ones who began to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.

❖ **"...for salvation comes of the Jews..."**: The Lord's words are intended to convey the following: 'The blessings granted to this world proceeds from the Jews (since the knowledge about God and the rejection of idols proceeded from them. In the case of your people- the Samaritans, you have received the teachings about worship from the Jews although you do not fulfill them correctly)...Accordingly, St. Paul indicates His coming in these words: "...of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came who is over all, the eternally blessed God" (Rom. 9:5). Note how He praises the Old Testament and clarifies that It is the basis of all blessings¹²².

❖ The Lord does not explain to the Samaritan woman why the fathers worshipped on this mountain, or why the Jews worship in Jerusalem. By being silent about this, He dismisses and cancels any further importance to both places. The Lord awakens her soul as He leads her to understand that neither the Samaritans nor the Jews could offer any act as great as the one foretold and that will be offered to us. Then He points to a

¹¹⁹ *Hom. On John, 33:1*

¹²⁰ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:26*

¹²¹ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:27*

¹²² *Hom. On John, 33:1*

distinctive point between them and concludes that in this respect the Jews are more honorable. Yet He does not show a preference for either place; in spite of the clarification the Lord gives concerning the Jews. It is as though He is saying: ‘No one should argue any more about worship in a certain place, yet the Jews have instinctively obtained that honor more than You Samaritans’; for He says: **“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know ...”**

If you wonder: How is it that the Samaritans did not know who they worshipped? My answer is: ‘They worshipped God because they believed that He could be confined to a specific place and be on their side. They believed that there is a god with limited powers and they accordingly worshipped and sought to gain his favor. As a result, they continued to worship idols besides worshipping the God of the whole world. The Lord said: **“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know ...”** because most of the Jews- even though some differed- did not follow this kind of thinking since they knew that God is the God of the whole world¹²³.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Since this woman addresses the Lord as she would address a Jewish person and believes Him to be a prophet, the Lord answers her as a Jewish person who is spiritually acquainted with the mysteries of the Law: “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know ...” He uses the plural pronoun ‘we’ as He includes Himself with other human beings. But how can He do so except by reference to His body; and in order to reveal that He is responding as an incarnated person; then He adds the words: “...salvation is of the Jews¹²⁴.”

St. Ambrose

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” [23]

Instead of being preoccupied with the place of worship it is essential to be concerned with the condition of inner thought, with God’s altar within the soul, and the manner of offering worship to God who is a spirit. Indeed, God the Father seeks those who worship Him with their hearts. Those are rare to find and Jeremiah reports this concerning them: “For who is this who pledged his heart to approach Me?” says the Lord (Jer.30:21). The path to worship in the spirit is narrow for in following that path a person seeks the glory of God and not of men.

Worshipping in the spirit transforms the heart into the real Zion for which the Lord yearns and which the Psalmist speaks about saying: ‘For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation: “This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it”’ (Ps 132:13-14).

❖ All the Jews and Samaritans were greatly concerned about their bodies and they purified themselves in so many different ways. For this reason the Lord explains that purity is not achieved by the purification of the hands but through the purification of the mind which is that intangible part of our being. With our minds we worship God who is ethereal. In the same manner, offerings cannot take the form of slaughtered bulls or sheep, but by the sanctification of one’s being to God. Exhaust your soul and in this way offer a living sacrifice¹²⁵

¹²³ Hom. On John, 33:1

¹²⁴ Of the Christian Faith, Book 5, Ch 4 (50)

¹²⁵ Hom. On John, 33:2

❖ As the Lord states the truth, He discards the Samaritans and the Jews; for although the Jews are better than the Samaritans, yet they are lesser than those coming into the faith-this indicates how much the symbol is lesser than the reality. He is speaking about the Church who knows how to worship in a manner that is correct and appropriate to God¹²⁶.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ It is important for a person to observe that true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth. They should do so not only in the future but as of the present time as well¹²⁷.

❖ The Father asks of those He prepares to become true worshippers. They need to be purified and to be taught the right teachings through the Word. Moreover, He seeks them through His Son who has come to look for the lost (Lk 19:10; Ezek. 34:16)

Origen

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” [24]

❖ By saying ‘**in truth**’ the Lord writes off the Jews and the Samaritans. The reason for this is that those Jews, even though they were better than the Samaritans, yet they were far behind those who would be called to worship ‘**in spirit and in truth**’...It is true that God had sought those people in the past...yet He had done so out of His tenderness and compassion and in order to gather them into the fold of the faithful. You might ask: ‘Who are those who worship in truth?’ My answer is: ‘They are those who do not associate their worship with a specific location for they are attracted and led by the spirit. St. Paul accordingly says: ‘...whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son...’ (Rom. 1:9); and in another passage he says: ‘I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service’ (Rom. 12:1). The Lord’s words to the Samaritan woman: “**God is Spirit ...**” has no other meaning except that He does not have a body. Consequently, worship dedicated to the Incorporeal should be free from a body too. We should offer worship with that which is incorporeal within us. In other words, worship should proceed from our spirit and with the purity of our mind. This is why the Lord says: “...**those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth**”¹²⁸.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ I cannot be so bold as to confine the infinite power of God or bind it to a narrow section of the earth since heaven and earth are incapable of containing the One who is the Infinite. Every believer will be judged according to the extent of his faith and not according to his habitation in one place or the other. True worshippers worship the Father, neither in Jerusalem nor in Gerizim¹²⁹.

St. Jerome

❖ Being the son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ submits to time, to the plan of God, and to relative humility. However, from the aspect of His divinity, he is not subject to

¹²⁶ Hom. 33 PG 59:191

¹²⁷ Hom. 33 PG 59:191

¹²⁸ Hom. On John,33

¹²⁹ Letter 58:3

time or place, for ‘who will declare His generation?’ (Is. 53:8).
“...**God is Spirit...**” for He who is Spirit has been born of the Spirit, being incorporeal and descendent of the Incomprehensible and Mysterious One. The Son Himself speaks to the Father saying: “The Lord has said to Me ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’” This ‘day’ is not a temporal one but an eternal one. The ‘today’ used here refers to an age before the world began and not to a temporal time: ‘I have begotten You from the womb before the morning star’^{130,131}.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ It should not amaze us that the Father and the Son are considered ‘Spirit.’ We will elaborate on that when we deal with the topic ‘One in the Name’...
Let them read that the Father is called the ‘**Spirit**’ and according to the Lord who says in the Bible: “...**For God is Spirit...**” [24]. The Lord Jesus Christ is called ‘**the Spirit**’ according to Jeremiah who says: “.....¹³²

St. Ambrose

❖ The words “**God is Spirit...**” do not change the facts that the Holy Spirit has a name of His own and that He is the great gift that is offered to us. As the Samaritan woman has placed boundaries for God confining Him in the mountain or in the temple, she is told that God embraces all things and is All- inclusive in Himself. Besides, He is intangible and incomprehensible; and therefore should be worshipped through intangible channels. Therefore the Lord teaches that God who is a Spirit must be worshipped in spirit. He reveals the limitless freedom, knowledge, and space opened up when we worship in spirit God the Spirit¹³³.

St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers

‘The woman said to Him: “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things” [25]

Finally the conversation turns to the subject of the Messiah. When the woman no longer opposes the Lord’s words; but rather senses the power within her, she poses the question that has preoccupied all the Jews and Samaritans: When will the Messiah come? All were awaiting that event, for in spite of the enmity that existed between them, yet they shared in this expectation. It could be that many teachers at that time were discussing this matter concerning the fulfillment of the divine promise and specifically the coming of the Messiah and His reign.

Even though she was corrupt on account of her sin, she still yearned to know the truth and humbly looked forward to the advent of the Savior. This yearning prepared her to the meeting with the Lord, getting to know Him, and witnessing for Him.

❖ Someone may ask: ‘How did the Samaritans get to expect the advent of the Messiah while they accepted Moses only?’ We respond as follows: ‘They get that out of the Books written by Moses, for he says: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’ (Deut 18:15).

❖ She was just a poor woman who had no prior knowledge of the Holy Books, therefore the Lord does not discuss what is written in them. He leads her to faith by

¹³⁰ Ps. 11:3 “.....”

¹³¹ Essay 11:5

¹³² Of the Holy Spirit, Book 1:9:105

¹³³ On the Trinity, Book 2 (31)

taking her through the path of the water¹³⁴.

❖ For the Jews who were constantly asking the question: ‘How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly’ (Jn10:24), the Lord did not give them a satisfying answer. However, He clearly informs the woman, saying: **“I...am He”** because, unlike the Jews, she was not biased and possessed a fair mind and conscience. They did not ask in order to learn and were constantly mocking Him...in contrast, she listened and believed and called others, as well, to the faith. On the whole, she is remarkable in her timing, control, and faith¹³⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

Jesus said to her: “I who speak to you am He” [26]

The Lord has not used such direct expressions as: **“I who speak to you am He”** when He spoke to the Jews or even with His own disciples.

❖ The harvest was ready for the prophets had laid the seeds to grow. Now they had become fully grown and waiting for the apostles to harvest them...The name ‘Messiah’ was not new to the Samaritan woman and she truly was awaiting His coming. She actually believed that He would come. From where did she possess such faith unless Moses had sowed it?¹³⁶

St. Augustine

❖ Indeed, the Lord did not give the Jews a clear answer while they constantly said to Him: “How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly” (Jn. 10:24); whereas He clearly informs the Samaritan woman: **“I ... am He.”**

St. John Chrysostom

12- THE SUCCESSFUL TESTIMONY OF THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

‘And At this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said: “What do You seek?” or “Why are You talking with her?” [27]

It did not occur to the disciples that their Teacher, whose great kingdom they awaited, would speak to a poor Samaritan woman. She did not belong to the lost flock of Israel, and in their minds she could not possibly have a role in His kingdom. So why was He talking to her?

Besides, it was not usual for men to speak with women in the streets, even if they were their wives. There were numerous laws laid by the Jewish leaders concerning this matter.

❖ The Lord Jesus Christ allowed Himself to talk with a poor Samaritan woman. However, the disciples were so astonished that they did not question Him as to why He talked with her. As disciples they were politely observant and aware of their ranking as His disciples; and in this light they paid Him respect, felt embarrassed, and honored Him as they would behave towards an amazing friend.

❖ What caused the disciples to be astonished? It is due to His great humility and lack

¹³⁴ *Hom. on John, 33:2*

¹³⁵ *Hom. on John, 33:2*

¹³⁶ *Sermon on N. T. Lessons, 51:2*

of any conceit that He engaged in a conversation with a woman who was not only poor, but a Samaritan as well¹³⁷.

St. John Chrysostom

‘The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men...’ [28]

When the Samaritan woman received the divine truth she abandoned her waterpot and forgot the reason that had brought her to the well. So she returned without getting water. However she returned to offer the water of truth to the people of the city. She left her waterpot because she did not want it to impede her from running to the city and giving testimony to the truth. She informed everyone in the streets that she had found the treasure she has been looking for, and that she has found the Source of her inner joy.

Earlier on the Lord had asked her to call her husband [16], and here she is calling all the men of the city and succeeded in her task.

She does not inform them that He discussed with her serious religious matters concerning worship and the manner it should be conducted. Instead, she informs them of how He has touched her heart truly because He knows her secrets, how He attracted her to Him by His powerful words, and consequently how this led her to recognize His person and that He is the Messiah.

❖ She could have abandoned her waterpot which was in a deep well. She took pride in its depth, in other words she took pride in the teachings. However, she has come to despise the thoughts she had accepted previously. Now she accepts a better pot than the earlier waterpot for it contains water ‘springing up into everlasting life’ [14]¹³⁸.

❖ Here is a woman who proclaims the Messiah to the Samaritans. At the end of the Gospels there is also another woman who is the first one to see Him and who informs the disciples about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ {Jn 20:18}¹³⁹.

❖ This is all what this Samaritan woman had done: she had a relationship with five husbands, then she got involved with a sixth man who was not her legal husband, and finally she renounced that last man, abandoned her waterpot, and rested reverently on a Saturday.

Besides, she brought great benefits to those who lived with her in the same city.

Based on her old beliefs, they shared incorrect teachings with her. This was the fault that led them to leave the city and come to the Lord Jesus Christ¹⁴⁰.

Origen

❖ Having received the Lord Jesus Christ into her heart, what else could she do but abandon her waterpot and run to preach the Gospel? She banished lust and hurried to proclaim the truth. May those who wish to preach the Gospel learn to abandon their waterpot at the well¹⁴¹.

St. Augustine

❖ She had come to drink water but once she got to know the true Source she immediately despised the material source. In this simple incident she teaches us to surpass the tangible matters of life when we hear about spiritual matters...she

¹³⁷ *Hom. on John, 33:3*

¹³⁸ *Commentary on John, Book 13:175*

¹³⁹ *Commentary on John, Book 13:179*

¹⁴⁰ *Commentary on John, Book 13:181*

¹⁴¹ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:30*

abandoned her waterpot without receiving an order from anyone; and she hurried, being carried on wings of joy and delight, to do what the evangelists have done. She called a whole city, and not just one or two as Andrew and Philip had done. And she brought them to the Lord Jesus Christ¹⁴².

❖ The Samaritan woman believed immediately and so she appears to be wiser than Nicodemus. Moreover, she is more courageous and steadfast than him since he did not go and call others to hear the words of the Lord. Nicodemus had listened to thousands of many more words from the Lord, yet he did not speak publicly or frankly to anyone. This woman did what the apostles had not done; for she preached to everyone and invited them to come to the Lord. In this manner, she led an entire city to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ¹⁴³.

St. John Chrysostom

“Come see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”[29]

The words of the woman reveal her inner joy: she has met the Messiah, the Savior of the world and so she came to enjoy the One who satisfies her depths. The six men did not give her any joy. However, her meeting with her Savior created in her the spirit of joy and inspired her to work in order to bring others to salvation.

The invitation was not for them to come and see something strange; or that they might engage into a conversation with Him. Rather, they were invited to enjoy the Discerner of hearts, the Messiah and Savior of the world. This is one of the most important features that the Jews expected to find in the Messiah: that He knows what is in men’s hearts.

Towards the end of the First Century and at the beginning of the Second Century Barchochab proclaimed that he is the Messiah. As he deceived many, they brought to him people that he did not know- some were criminals and some were innocent- and they asked him to signal out the first from the latter. When he was unable to do so, they killed him.

The Samaritan woman was wise in her manner of preaching. She did not dictate to them her own belief in Him, but wisely asked them to come, see, and verify for themselves concerning the person of the Lord: **“Could this be the Christ?”[29]**

❖ Notice once more the great wisdom of the woman as she neither proclaims the truth clearly nor does she remain silent or seek to attract them through her own convincing words. Rather, she invites them to listen to Him so that they might come to share the same opinion she had. That is why, in fact, they accepted her words¹⁴⁴.

❖ She is not embarrassed to say that He had told her everything that she had done...for material matters did not matter any longer. Besides, she is determined to disregard worldly glory or shame. Indeed, she had become devoted to one thing only and that was this holy torch ignited within her and which filled her being¹⁴⁵.

❖ **“Could this be the Christ?”[29]** She did not want to draw them based on her own determination and conviction. Rather, she wanted them to draw their own conclusion after hearing Him. This is what made her words more acceptable to them...she did not say ‘Come and believe’ but said **“Come see...”** and this expression sounded more gentle and appealing to them¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴² Hom. on St. John, 34:1

¹⁴³ Hom on John, 32

¹⁴⁴ Hom. 34, PG 59:195

¹⁴⁵ Hom on John, 34:1

¹⁴⁶ Hom on John, 34:1

St. John Chrysostom

❖ There is no person who is happier than a Christian person for such a person has the promise of the kingdom of God. No one struggles with more power than a Christian as he/she daily encounters dangers. No one is more powerful since a Christian is capable of conquering Satan...can anyone be found who is more sinful than the Samaritan woman? Yet she is not the only one who believed...and after her six men, she finds the one Lord. She not only gets acquainted with the Lord at the well- that same One whom the Jews failed to recognize in the temple- but she brings salvation to many. She does so while the disciples were busy buying food that would satisfy the Lord who was hungry and tired¹⁴⁷.

St. Jerome

❖ The words spoken to the Samaritan woman affect her so much that she abandons her waterpot and neglects her purpose for coming to the well. She returns to her city to draw all the people there to the Lord. Just contemplate her caution and understanding: she had come to drink and when she finds the true Source, she despises the tangible one. She therefore becomes our teacher since she undertakes, as much as she can, to do the work which the Lord's apostles have done. They too had abandoned their nets when they responded to the Lord's call. On her own, she decides to leave her waterpot and undertakes the task of a preacher. She does not call just one or two persons but she invites a whole city; and it is difficult to report the exact figure or the huge numbers who came to the Lord Jesus Christ through her. Notice the woman's understanding as she leads the people of the city to the Lord. She does not tell them: 'Come, see the Christ'; but rather uses the same strategy the Lord used to appeal to her: **"Come see a Man who told me all things that I ever did."** The woman said: **"Come see a Man who told me all things that I ever did."** She is not embarrassed to say this, even though she could have said something else, such as: 'Come and see someone who is prophesying.' However, when the divine fire touches any of us, no earthly consideration- such as honor or shame- occupies our minds. Notice the woman's wisdom as she does not confirm that He is the Messiah for a clear reason. At the same time, she is not silent since she desires to draw them to Him. She seeks to do so by drawing them to hear Him; rather than by convincing them of her own belief.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The Jews rejected the Lord Jesus Christ when He came, whereas the devils recognized Him. David, the Lord's grandfather, is not ignorant about Him when he says: "I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed...(Ps. 132:17). This light is the brilliance of Sonship according to some interpreters (2 Peter 1:19); or according to others, the body which the Lord took from the holy Virgin Mary ... Moreover, the prophet is not ignorant about the subject of the Lord Jesus Christ as he says: 'He has proclaimed His Anointed among mankind' (....4:13-Septuagint Translation). None of the prophets are ignorant about Him: Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, as well as all the other prophets perceived Him. Even the devils recognized Him so that He rebuked them...

¹⁴⁷ Letter 125:1

The chief priest did not recognize Him, whereas the devils acknowledged Him. The chief priest did not perceive Him, whereas the Samaritan woman proclaimed Him, saying: **“Come see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”**[4:29]¹⁴⁸.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

‘Then they went out of the city and came to Him.’ [30]

The time had come when the lepers would preach the great salvation to the people of Samaritan origin (2Kgs. 7:3). Now here is a Samaritan woman, who in spite of her painful past, becomes the first one to preach the good news to Samaria. Consequently, she wins the whole city to the credit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. John Chrysostom

‘In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying “Rabbi, eat” [31]

While the Samaritan women hurried to preach with all her strength, the disciples were busy offering food to the Lord, for He was hungry and tired.

‘But He said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know” [31]

Origen comments: ‘The body requires food that is different from that of the spirit. And just as the bodies themselves have different needs regarding the kind and quantity of food, so too do the spirits and souls have different requirements. The Lord Jesus Christ seizes every chance to lift the minds and hearts of the disciples to matters beyond time and to the heavens themselves. He reveals to them the extent of His joy that arises from the redemption of souls. This represents His delicious food. He finds his satisfaction and comfort in toiling for every soul and in fulfilling His Father’s plan. He will not rest and will persevere in the task until He leaves this world.

❖ Indeed, the same nourishing words and meditative thoughts and the actions relevant and accompanying them are not suitable for all souls.

Truly, there are vegetables and there is food for the strong (Rom. 14:2; Heb. 5:2) which may not promote progress to the needy souls if they are offered at the same time.

In this context, St. Peter says: ‘...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the world, that you may grow thereby’ (1Peter 2:2). The same thing applies to some who are like children as in the case of the Corinthians and to whom St. Paul says: ‘I fed you with milk and not solid food...’ (1 Cor.3:2).

May those who are weak eat vegetables since they do not believe (Rom.14:2). This is what St. Paul is teaching when he says: “For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables” (Rom.14:2).

Truly, there is a time when ‘better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred’ (read Prov.15:17). ‘But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil’ (Heb. 5:14). However, there is also food that is hateful as we learn in the Book of Kings when the men told Elisha: “O man of God, there is death in the pot” (2Kgs.4:40)...

It is appropriate to lift our thoughts from the level of unreasoning creatures and mankind to that of the angels who are refreshed by food. They are not completely self-sufficient and as the Psalmist says: ‘Men ate angels’ food...’ (Ps. 78:25).

¹⁴⁸ Essay 10:15

Now we need to go back to the statement before us concerning the food of the Lord Jesus Christ and with which the disciples were not familiar until that moment. The Lord truly says: **“I have food to eat of which you do not know” [4:31]** because the disciples are not aware of what the Lord was doing: He was obeying the will of He who has sent Him and fulfilling His perfect work [34]. He performs the will of God which is one and the same as His own will¹⁴⁹.

Origen

St. Augustine comments that the food of the Lord is found in the accomplishment of the Father’s will and in drinking of the woman’s faith in Him. In this manner, the Lord feeds her of His body which is the Church- in other words- she becomes a member in His body. **Origen** considers that every reasoning creature, and not just man alone, will enjoy perfection through the Lord Jesus Christ since they all are God’s creation¹⁵⁰.

❖ When each one of us becomes perfect through the Lord Jesus Christ, and since he is the work of God, then he/she can say: ‘ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness...’ (2 Tim. 4:7-8)¹⁵¹.

Origen

❖ The Lord was sitting and felt hungry and thirsty; then he got nourished and filled by the faith of the Samaritan woman.

St. Jerome

❖ Would it have been amazing if this woman had not understood the Lord’s words about the water? Notice how the disciples could not understand His words about the food¹⁵².

St. Augustine

Therefore the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?”[33]

The disciples do not understand that the divine Word had supported Elijah in the wilderness near the Brook of Cherith, where He sent him daily food through a raven (1 Kgs.17:4-6). Moreover, angels had come to serve the Lord Jesus Christ when He was in the desert (Matt.4:11).

Jesus said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know,” [34]

St. Ambrose notes that the Lord’s words here refer to the effect of the Lord in men’s lives. This leads them to do God’s will and achieve His work. Consequently, the work which men do because they are members in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ is considered work done by the Lord Himself¹⁵³.

What we eat, drink, read, our manner of service, and our worship are all devoted to the service of souls and their salvation. This is the will of our heavenly Father, and this is the delicious food for our souls.

Souls have been ruined due to ignorance. However, God has granted us the keys to

¹⁴⁹ *Commentary on John, Book 13:206-217*

¹⁵⁰ *Commentary on John, Book 13:245*

¹⁵¹ *Commentary on John, Book 13: 242*

¹⁵² *Letter 108:13*

¹⁵³ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:31*

the Kingdom- and that is His holy Bible- and the knowledge of His Word.

❖ The banquet which Solomon speaks about is not achieved simply through regular food. Indeed, this has to mean that it can be achieved through good works. For how can the soul enjoy a banquet more wisely than through good works; or what can preoccupy the minds of the righteous more easily than knowing how to achieve good works? What other food can bring more joy than that of doing God's will? The Lord informs us that He alone richly possesses that food, and as He says in the Bible: **"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me"** [34]. It is with this food that people rejoice as they get equipped with the amazing knowledge, and which teaches them to climb up to the heavenly pleasures. Then they are able to comprehend the extent of such joy, the purity it implies and which the mind can understand. Therefore may we eat the bread of wisdom and get filled and satiated with the Word of God. For the life of man, which has been created in the image of God, is not fulfilled by bread alone "but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt.4:4). The saintly Job says: "They waited for me as for the rain, and they opened their mouth wide as for the spring rain..." (Job 29:23)¹⁵⁴.

❖ Since He finds His food in doing His Father's will, then He also finds it in sharing our sufferings¹⁵⁵.

St. Ambrose

❖ "Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits' (Sg. Of Sol. 4:16). This is a bold expression coming from a soul filled with fervor. It arises magnificently and surpasses all expression.

Who is the one that the bride invites to her banquet which consists of her own fruit? For whom does she prepare her banquet which she has filled out of her own sources? Who is the one that the bride invites to eat from what she has provided? He is the One who "...of Him and through Him and to Him are all things..." (Rom. 11:36). He gives everyone his food in due season...; He opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing (Ps. 145:15,16); He is 'the bread which came down from heaven...' (Jn. 6:41). He is the One who gives life to the world and makes the waters flow from His own source of life.

He is the One for Whom the bride prepares her table and she is the garden in which living trees grow.

The trees are symbols for us and our loyal spirits represent the food that is presented to Him. For the Lord says to His disciples: **"I have food to eat of which you do not know,"**(Jn 4:32,34). His food is to achieve the will of God for He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim 2:4)

This salvation is the food that is prepared for Him. Our free will gives the fruit to God, that is our souls so that He may pluck its small branch. At the beginning, the bride enjoyed the sweet apple and said, "his fruit was sweet to my taste." (Sg. Of Sol. 2:3) then she herself became the beautiful sweet fruit that is offered to the shepherd so that He may enjoy it.¹⁵⁶ Saint Gregory of Nyssa

"Do not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'?

Behold, I say to you,

Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest." [35]

¹⁵⁴ *Duties of the Clergy 1:31:163-164*

¹⁵⁵ *Sermon Against Auxentius, 14*

¹⁵⁶ *Song of Solomon by Saint Gregory of Nyssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, Sermon 10.*

The Lord Jesus Christ hid the spiritual secret meaning behind His talk about the harvest. For, He means the harvest of the kingdom of heaven that shall be achieved after four periods of time. In the first period man was in the Garden of Eden where he did not offer the suitable fruit. Then there was the period of the natural law (the father patriarchs) followed by the era of Moses' Law, and finally, the fourth period is that of grace. The harvest of each era is for the kingdom of heaven. The harvest is complete with the coming of Christ on the clouds. This is the end of the fourth era.

The Lord Jesus Christ desires the harvest that will not be achieved without serious work with joy and perseverance. Work is definitely necessary and urgent in order that the harvest may be enjoyable.

He sees the coming harvest when many Samaritans come to Him through the service of the Samaritan woman. They will believe in Him and will be qualified for wearing the white clothes.

+ "Lift up your eyes." This expression occurs in many places in the Holy Bible for the divine Word urges us to raise our thoughts and vision upwards. It is written in Isaiah, "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who has created these things" (Is 40:26).

+ When the Savior began to speak about the blessings, He 'lifted up His eyes' toward His disciples and said, "Blessed" are these and those (see Luke 6:20). That is because below there is no real disciple of Jesus nor is there anyone reposing in Abraham's bosom. The rich man who suffered 'lifted up his eyes' to see Abraham and Lazarus in his bosom (Lk 16:23).¹⁵⁷

+ No one lifts up his eyes if he continues in doing the works of the flesh.¹⁵⁸

+ The Word who is present with the disciples urges His listeners to lift up their eyes to the fields of the Holy Bible and to the fields of the aim of everything existing so that they may see the brilliant light of the truth and His splendor everywhere. For according to Solomon, "they are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge." (Prov. 8:9)¹⁵⁹ Origen

Saint Jerome wrote to Abigaus, the priest of Baetica in Spain, to console him because of his physical blindness and to revive in him the spirit of joy because of the inner perception that he enjoyed.

+ Saint Jerome wrote, "it befits you that you do not grieve. You are deprived of those two physical eyes that the ants, insects and reptiles have. You should rather be happy that you have the eyes mentioned in the Song of Solomon: 'Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes' (Sg. Of Sol. 4:9). This is the eye that sees God, and that Moses mentions when he says, 'I will now turn aside, and see this great sight' (Ex 3:3). Jeremiah wrote, 'for death is come up into our windows' (Jer 9:21 LXX). Furthermore, Christ told His disciples to lift up their eyes and behold His word 'for they are already white for harvest' [35]."¹⁶⁰ Saint Jerome

"And he who reaps receives wages,

¹⁵⁷ *Commentary on John, Book 13:274-276.*

¹⁵⁸ *Commentary on John, Book 13:278.*

¹⁵⁹ *Commentary on John, Book 13:284.s)*

¹⁶⁰ *Letter 76:2.*

and gathers fruit for eternal life,
that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.” [36]

Now the LORD Christ approaches as the sower who sows the word in the heart of the Samaritan woman and in very few hours He takes the role of the reaper. He is full of joy because of the fruit that has saved all the residents of that town, for they say, “this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” [42]

+ Christ means the spiritual reaper because the fruit of the material harvest does not extend to eternal life; it has only temporary life. On the other hand, the fruit of the spiritual harvest reaches a life without senility or death. Do you see how His words are sensitive and have spiritual meaning? Saint John Chrysostom

+ Take into consideration that if Moses and the prophets had sown, since they wrote those things “for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor 10:11), they announced Christ’s journey. Behold also if those who reaped were the apostles who accepted Christ and saw His glory that conforms to the mental seeds of the prophets concerning Him, the fruit they reaped was “the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden” and “was manifest in these last times” (Eph 3:9; 1 Pet 1:20). “Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.” (Eph 3:5)

Now, the entire design concerning the announcement of the mystery that was hidden in secrecy for eternal times is revealed in the books of the prophets and in the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ. This happened at the time when the true light caused the fields to be white for harvest, for He radiated as being the Seed.

In accordance to this interpretation, the fields in which the seeds were sown are the writings of the Law and the prophets that did not become white for those who did not accept the coming of the Word. But they became white for those who believed in the Son of God and obeyed Him when He said, “lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest.” [35]¹⁶¹

+ As true disciples of Jesus, let us lift up our eyes and look at the fields that Moses and the prophets sowed so that we may see their whiteness and how they were made ready for the harvest of their fruits that will be gathered for eternal life. Let us look in hope of also obtaining a reward from the LORD of the fields and giver of the seeds.¹⁶²

+ Any man, whoever he may be, who reads “many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 8:11) will agree that the sower and the reaper will rejoice together where all moaning, sadness and pain will “flee away” (Is 35:10).

If anyone hesitates in accepting the fact that until now the sower rejoices with all those who reap, let him remember what happened in the Transfiguration of Jesus as a kind of harvest. Jesus appeared in glory not only to the reapers, Peter, James and John, who went up with Him on the mountain, but also to the sowers Moses and Elijah who had sown before and were so enlightened by the Father and enlightened those who saw Him. Thus now Moses and Elijah are seen together with the holy

¹⁶¹ *Commentary on John, Book 13:305-307.*

¹⁶² *Commentary on John, Book 13:308.*

apostles.¹⁶³ Origen

“For in this the saying is true,
One sows
And another reaps.” [37]

Now the LORD Christ sends His disciples to the harvest in the fields where the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament labored for such a long time.

+ We can say that one belongs to the Law and the other to the Gospel, but they rejoice together [36] as they have one aim. This was given to them by the One God in Jesus Christ the One who is stored for them in the One Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁴ Origen

+ The prophets are those who sowed and did not reap. Those who reap are the apostles. However, those who only sowed were not deprived of the joy of the reward for their labor. They rejoiced and were happy even though they did not reap.¹⁶⁵ Saint John Chrysostom

“I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored;
others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.” [38]

+ Why did Christ say these words to His disciples? So that when He sends them to preach, they may not be troubled as though they were sent to do a very difficult work, for the work of the prophets was more full of hardship. The disciples came to do easier tasks than others, for just as the fruit is gathered in the harvest easily, likewise is the effort of the disciples now. In this way Christ encouraged His disciples very much because this work, if it is thought to be difficult, since they will travel the world to preach repentance, it is indeed, Christ explains to them, an easy work. The work that was very difficult was the work done by those who sowed the seeds to let a distant soul enter into the knowledge of God.¹⁶⁶

+ Now, harvesting is different from planting. You have been reserved for a work that is less difficult and more pleasing. You will not sow because this needs greater effort and pain.

In harvesting we obtain a great crop but the effort and pain are not as great. Indeed, harvesting is easier... The toilsome work that requires much labor is sowing the seeds and introducing into the knowledge of God the soul that has not obtained the membership in the church... The desire of the prophets was to bring all humanity to Me. This was the design of the Law. For this reason they sowed in order that they may produce fruit. In all this it is evident that He sent them also and the relation between the new and the old is great. He revealed all this in this parable.¹⁶⁷ Saint John Chrysostom

+ The Word always shows the work of the ancient people more clearly to the true disciples in order that they may practice the same effort and face the same trouble

¹⁶³ *Commentary on John, Book 13:309-310.*

¹⁶⁴ *Commentary on John, Book 13:322.*

¹⁶⁵ *Hom on John, 34:2.*

¹⁶⁶ *Hom. On John, 34:2.*

¹⁶⁷ *Hom 34. PG 59:197-198.*

faced by the sowers.¹⁶⁸ Origen

5—The Samaritans Believe in Him

“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’” [39]

The people of Sychar did not see any miracle but the person and divine speech of the LORD Christ attracted them to Him. They exulted in Christ’s word that grants life. The evangelist stresses this point in the next section.

Earlier, in His previous dialogue with Nicodemus, the religious leader, the LORD concentrates on the new birth through baptism. Here, the LORD draws attention to His person in order that the gentiles may accept Him and enjoy His work of salvation.

+ If we contemplate what is said about Samaria, the Samaritan woman, and Jacob’s well, it is not difficult for us to see that those who were surrounded by false teachings left the town of their ideas so that they may enjoy the true teaching. When they left that town they believed truly in the teaching of redemption because one woman had accepted the preaching of salvation at Jacob’s well. She had left her water-pot mentioned previously so that she may call the others to benefit in the same way.¹⁶⁹
Origen

“So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them, and He stayed there two days.” [40]

In Origen’s opinion, Jesus stayed with them but not in their city, for they had gone out of their city and had come to Him. Scripture does not say that He performed miracles among them. For they were simple people in need of, and ready for listening to the Word. They were attached to the LORD Christ for the truth. They did not want miracles to ascertain Him as did many leaders of Judea.

In the gospel according to Saint Luke, the Samaritans refused to receive Christ in their village (Lk 9:53). However, here, we find the Samaritans urging Him to stay with them. Thus, in every nation we find those who accept the truth and those who cannot tolerate it.

Although the LORD Christ was on His way from Judea to Galilee, and He only passed through Samaria, yet, finding an opportunity for service, and acceptance of the word, He did not refuse the wish of the Samaritans but stayed with them two days.

+ Jesus stays with those who ask Him, especially those who leave their city and come to Him following the example of Abraham when he obeyed God who said to him, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred and from thy father’s house” (Genesis 12:1).¹⁷⁰

+ Jesus stays two days with those who request Him because they cannot yet reach His third day. They are unable to comprehend any miraculous deed. They are unlike those

¹⁶⁸ *Commentary on John, Book 13:326.*

¹⁶⁹ *Commentary on John, Book 13:340.*

¹⁷⁰ *Commentary on John, Book 13:246.*

who ate with Jesus on the third day of the wedding in Cana of Galilee (Jn 2:1).¹⁷¹
Origen

“And many more believed because of His own word.” [41]

Their meeting with the LORD granted them growth in faith and an increase in the number of believers.

+ The Jews obtained more knowledge than the Samaritans; they always recognized the prophets and ate with them. However, they now appear lagging behind the Samaritans who believe in Christ on the strength of a woman’s testimony and without seeing even one miracle. The Samaritans went out quickly and urged Christ to stay with them. As for the Jews, they saw Christ’s miracles with their own eyes, yet they did not ask Him to stay with them, and they even drove Him away and used every means to chase Him away from their cities, though He had come originally for their sake.¹⁷²

+ These Samaritans will judge the Jews and their judgment will be their faith in Christ and acceptance of Him. For, those Jews opposed Christ continuously in spite of His works and miracles. But the Samaritans, without miracles, declared their belief in Him. Saint John Chrysostom

“And they said to the woman,
‘Now we believe, not because of what you said,
for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.’” [42]

Seeing the LORD Christ and hearing Him consolidated their belief that they got through the woman. Therefore, many were attracted to that faith. They also recognized Jesus as the Savior, not only of the Jews or with them the Samaritans, but also He is indeed the Savior of the world. He is He about whom Isaiah the prophet says, “I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Is 49:6).

Their faith is the certainty that ‘indeed [He] is the Christ, the Savior of the world.’ It is as the queen of Sheba said to the king Solomon, “It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it; and, behold, the half was not told me” (1 Kings 10:6-7).

These are the seeds that the LORD Christ sowed in Samaria in two days. We read that after four or five years Philip preached in Samaria where he found good seeds in the field (Acts 8:5-6,8). He also found evil people like Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-10).

+ The students surpassed their teachers and by their belief in Him and acceptance of Him they obtained the right to judge the Jews. They realized at once that He will attract the world to Himself and that He came to give us perfect salvation. His care is not limited to the Jews alone. He is the true Savior who grants the true eternal salvation, not a temporary one.¹⁷³ Saint John Chrysostom

¹⁷¹ *Commentary on John, Book 13:347.*

¹⁷² *Hom. On John, 35:1.*

¹⁷³ *Hom. On John, 35:1.*

+ They did not describe Christ as savior as a simple characteristic, but they said, “we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” He grants the true redemption, not only the temporary deliverance. This they said out of pure faith. The evidence is in that their belief was not because of miracles they saw. Secondly, though they heard the woman say doubtfully, ‘Could this be the Christ?’ they did not say we think He is the Christ, but they said, “we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” They did not acknowledge Christ as one of many. They affirmed that He is indeed the Savior and though they did not see Him saving but only heard His words, they made that statement. If they had seen His miracles they would have made many great declarations. Moreover, as they said that Christ is the Savior of the world, they made it clear that He is the Savior of the false or lost world. Saint John Chrysostom

+ They denied that their belief was based on the woman’s words because when they heard the Savior Himself they discovered that hearing Him was better, for they also knew that “He is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” [42]. In fact it is better to be an eyewitness of the Word and listen to Him without using the physical members or allowing the interference of teachers. He teaches and presents images to the mind to reveal the truth more clearly. It is better for a person to hear Him than to listen to a report about Him through the servants who saw Him, for the person who does not hear Him personally or see Him is not covered by His power.¹⁷⁴

+ It is not an amazing thing, in reality, that it is said about some that they behave in accordance to their faith, not according to their discernment, and about others that their conduct follows their discernment (insight) that is greater than conduct in faith (without the experience of insight).¹⁷⁵ Origen

6-- He Goes to Galilee

“Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee.”[43]

+ He spent two days in Samaria and the Samaritans believed in Him. He spent many days in Galilee but the Galileans did not believe in Him. The Samaritans did not expect a miracle; they believed His word. When they heard Him talk many Samaritans believed. On the other hand, when He performed a miracle in Galilee, no one in that place believed except the household of the nobleman whose son was healed [53].¹⁷⁶ Saint Augustine

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“For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.” [44]

Some commentators observe that the evangelist, here, means that Jesus went to Galilee, not to Nazareth, though the LORD usually mentioned this proverb with reference to His country “Nazareth” (Matt 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24). The LORD Christ did not go to His country, but to Galilee. He did not desire

¹⁷⁴ *Commentary on John, Book 13:352.*

¹⁷⁵ *Commentary on John, Book 13:363.*

¹⁷⁶ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 16:3.*

temporary honor; He rather did not wish to intrude on people who rejected Him. Even when He appeared to His disciples during the storm, He, according to the evangelist, entered the boat only when the disciples “willingly received Him.” The LORD longs to cross over to us, to enter our city and guide the ship of our life, but not by force, but only when we request Him to do so. Moreover, to those who want Him and honor Him, He says, “I honor those who honor Me; those who despise Me are disparaged.” (Prov.) He went to Galilee after He had given every possible chance for His people and country. For He says, “I have spread out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people” (Is 65:2; Romans 10:21).

+ Why did He add that proverb? That is because He did not go to Capernaum, but to Galilee, then to Cana. And so that you may not ask why did He not stay with His people but stayed with the Samaritans, the evangelist mentions the reason which is that His people had no interest in Him. He did not go there so that they may not have greater judgment. For, I think that here He speaks of Capernaum as His “country.” Besides, to show that He was not honored there, He says, “And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades” (Matt 11:23). He called it His country because it was there that He achieved the provision of the Word (the divine Incarnation) and He lived in particular there.¹⁷⁷ Saint John Chrysostom

“So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast.” [45]

The Galileans received Him as being the Promised Messiah because they had seen the signs and miracles He did in Jerusalem at the Passover (John 2:23).

+ Look! The Samaritans and the Galileans believed in Christ to shame the Jews and to embarrass them. The Samaritans were better than the Galileans because the Samaritans received Him when they heard the words of the woman, but the Galileans received Him when they saw His miracles. The evangelist mentions the man who heard about the miracle (changing water into wine at Cana of Galilee) to exalt the praise of the Samaritans. For, the men of Cana received Christ because of the miracle performed in Jerusalem; but in the case of the Samaritans, they received Him only because of His doctrine.¹⁷⁸ Saint John Chrysostom

“So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum.”[46]

Cana was on the way from Nazareth to Capernaum and the Sea of Tiberias.

The learned Origen thinks that Jesus’ two visits to Cana of Galilee denote His first and last coming. At His first visit He changed water into wine; during the second visit He gave life to the nobleman’s son who was at the point of death. Origen writes, “The Word also visits the spirit twice. During the first visit He grants the spirit wine from water for the joy of those who celebrate the feast together. During the second visit He removes all sickness from the spirit for a long time and takes away all threats of

¹⁷⁷ *Homilies on St. John, 35:1.*

¹⁷⁸ *Homilies on St. John, 35:2.*

death.”¹⁷⁹

+ During the first trip after our baptism He makes us abide joyfully with Him. He grants us to drink the wine of His power. That water that they drew at first Jesus changed into wine. For, indeed, the holy Bible was water before Jesus came; but after His First Coming the Bible became wine for us. In His Second Coming, God gives Him the judgment and He liberates us from the fever of the time of judgment. He heals the nobleman’s son from fever. He heals him completely; this son may be considered the son of Abraham, or the son of a ruler called a nobleman.¹⁸⁰ Origen

+ He came to Galilee because of the envy of the Jews. But why did He come to Cana? He came the first time as one invited to a wedding. But why does He come now? I think, so that by His visit He may consolidate the faith that He planted with His miracle, and so that He may attract them to Himself even more when He comes having invited Himself, leaving His city and favoring them.¹⁸¹ Saint John Chrysostom

7-- A Nobleman’s Son Is Healed

“When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.” [47]

The LORD Christ did nothing but only spoke and His words granted life to a person who was at the point of death [47].

The nobleman, Basilibos, was the guard of the royal palace. Many scholars conjecture that the king that Basilibos served was Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee whom the people called “king.” Saint Jerome believes the man’s name was Palantinus, but others think his name was Chuza (Luke 8:3) the husband of Joanna who followed the LORD Christ with the women who provided for Him from their possessions. Still other writers say that the man was Manaen (Acts 13:1).

The account here is accurate, for it is said, he “implored Him to come down.” The reason is that the LORD was in Cana of Galilee that is on a very high hill while Capernaum is on the shore of the Sea of Galilee at the sea level. This shows that the writer knows very well the nature of that region.

The king’s steward (the nobleman) came from Capernaum to Cana, a distance of about 16 miles.

Saint John Chrysostom says that that person was either a member of the royal family, or was highly honored because of his office. He was, therefore, called a nobleman. Some commentators consider him the person mentioned in Matt 8:5, but the Saint disagrees because the difference between those two men is not only in the degree of honor, but also in faith. The man mentioned in the Gospel according to Saint Mathew had greater faith, for even when Jesus desired to go to him, he begged Him not to leave. On the other hand, this nobleman entreated the LORD to go to his house although the LORD did not ask that. The first man said, “I am not worthy that You should come under my roof.” The second man urged the LORD to go, for he said, “Sir, come down before my child dies!” In the first case, the LORD had come down

¹⁷⁹ *Commentary on John, Book 13:392.*

¹⁸⁰ *Commentary on John, Book 13:438-439.*

¹⁸¹ *Homilies on St. John, 35:2..*

from the mountain and had entered Capernaum. But here He came from Samaria and did not enter Capernaum but went to Cana where this man met Him. The first man's servant was paralyzed, but this man's son was feverish.¹⁸²

“Then Jesus said to him,
Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.” [48]

The LORD did not say to him that he had no faith, but that he was weak in his faith. He was unable to believe that the LORD could heal the child without going in person from Cana to Capernaum. This is the weak faith that is built on miracles. It is a faith that is often only mental and is therefore subject to weakness and doubt. This is contrary to the faith through God's revelation to the spirit and the consequent exultation at the mysteries of the divine word.

Saint John Chrysostom asks why did the LORD Christ say this although it is clear that that man was a believer and as soon as he heard the LORD Christ's word, he believed [50]? Saint John Chrysostom then answers his own question. He says, “The LORD's motive was either to bear witness to the Samaritans who believed without seeing wonders, or to influence Capernaum that is thought to be His country and where that person came from. Besides, consider the saying of another man, “LORD, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24) and you will understand that though this nobleman believed, his belief was not complete or sound. This becomes evident when he inquires about the hour when his child got better [52] to know whether his son was healed normally or as a result of Christ's order.”¹⁸³

“The nobleman said to Him,
“Sir, come down before my child dies!”[49]

In spite of his faith that caused him to travel all that distance and leave his son on his deathbed to meet the LORD Christ, yet in weakness he did not realize that he talked to the conqueror of death and giver of resurrection. In bitterness he urged the LORD Christ to go to his house before his son dies. Terror filled the heart of this father who was about to lose his son. The LORD showed reluctance, not because He did not share the feelings of this father who was alarmed, but rather to edify the spirit of this man and many other spirits. The LORD desires to direct the attention of this father and of those around him toward the mystery of life and resurrection, to Himself as the Savior of the world. The miracle is given as an additional blessing to one who seeks the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Saint Augustine has often spoken about our weak relationship with God and our deviation when we are attentive only to the worldly pleasures and blessings granted by God who does all good things instead of being preoccupied with God Himself and having Him inside us.

In this same spirit, Saint Paul asks us not to have a relationship with the saints based on the benefit of their help especially in solving material, moral or social problems. Our relationship with them should be, in the first degree, a relationship of love as a foundation for taking them as our guides in the LORD Jesus. Saint Paul writes, “Remember those who lead you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”

¹⁸² *Homilies on St. John, 35:2.*

¹⁸³ *Homilies on St. John, 35:2.*

+ Contemplate the words of the nobleman and how they reveal his weakness. He should have imagined in our LORD greatness for the sake of his son. For, in saying to Christ, “Sir, come down before my child dies”, he brought Christ down to the level of one who cannot raise the child after his death and also one who did not know the boy’s condition. For this reason Christ blamed him touching his conscience and showing him that His miracles are performed for the benefit of the spirit. Here He heals the father’s sick reasoning and urges us to be interested not in His wonders, but in His doctrine. For the signs are not for the believers, but for the unbelieving.¹⁸⁴ Saint John Chrysostom

+ He had a weak faith in this because he assumed that Christ could not heal except when He is personally present. If he had believed perfectly he would have known that there is no place where God is not present...He who has created all things with His will can heal with a mere command.¹⁸⁵ Pope Gregory (the Great)

“Jesus said to him,
‘Go your way; your son lives.’
So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him; and he went his way.” [50]

The LORD Christ’s interest in directing the nobleman to the living, mighty faith does not mean that Christ ignored the effort this man made in his trip to come to Jesus. For, our Christ does not forget the labor of love or the cup of cold water given in His name. Indeed, He is all love and does not ignore the feelings of a father who watches his son on his deathbed. The agony of this father’s heart and, lastly, this man’s perseverance are recognized. Christ desires us to pray and not lose heart. He praised the widow whom the unjust judge answered because of her persistent pleading. In saying, “Go your way; your son lives” He revealed His absolute authority. He is King of kings and LORD of lords. He “has life in Himself” He has authority; He rebukes affliction and it leaves, death and it goes away. The nobleman knows the authority and power of royal orders that allow no reluctance or negligence. He accepted the word of Jesus as a royal command and went away full of trust, without argument or dialogue, to enjoy this precious treasure that is the divine active order! The officer believed, but his faith was on condition that he made sure that his son was healed. Therefore, it is later said that “he himself believed, and his whole household” [53]

“And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying,
‘Your son lives’ [51]
Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better.
And they said to him ‘Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.’” [52]

With this question the nobleman revealed his weak faith. However, it has been said about the LORD, “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench” (Matt 12:20). He is the shepherd who takes care of His sheep to support them and take them into the enclosure of faith.

“So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, ‘Your son lives.’

¹⁸⁴ Hom 35, PG 59:204.

¹⁸⁵ Hom 28, Forty Gospel Homilies. PL 76:1211.

And he believed, and his whole household.” [53]
This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.”
[54]

The evangelist had previously mentioned the miracle of changing water into wine when he said that Jesus came to Cana of Galilee [46]. Here, he refers to it by saying, “This again is the second sign Jesus did...” as though he wishes to link the two signs. The first sign the LORD Christ did at the beginning of His service is that He made the world an eternal wedding where everybody enjoys the wine of God’s love and the heavenly continuous joy. The second sign when the nobleman’s son was at the point of death – and most probably he was a Gentile – Christ granted him health. Here Christ declared that He desired the security of His people or of His bride. The LORD Christ was glorified in the first miracle in front of the Jewish master of the wedding; now He is glorified before the entire multitude that came to the house of the Gentile nobleman.

Saint John Chrysostom observes that the evangelist mentions this to reveal the eminence of the Samaritans who believed in the LORD Christ without seeing the first or second miracle, but received Him through His doctrine.

❖ This saying implies also praise for the Samaritans. It shows that the Jews, after the second sign did not reach the loftiness of the Samaritans who did not see even one sign.

❖ The evangelist did not write the words ‘the second’ without aim. He wanted to increase our astonishment at the Samaritans by indicating that even when the second sign was accomplished, those who saw it did not reach the elevation of those who did not see it.¹⁸⁶ Saint John Chrysostom

Inspired by John Chapter Four

The Spring of Your Love Waters the Depth of My Spirit

❖ Your wonderful love defies all rules
No difficulty or obstacle stands in its way.
For the sake of a poor, disreputable Samaritan woman
You went to Samaria on foot and fasting!
You whom the heavenly beings long to carry.
Your tender body was exhausted
But Your spirit was thirsty for the woman’s salvation.

❖ The Samaritan woman was ashamed to go in the morning fearing
she would meet anyone.
She had no servant or maid to fetch water for her.
She found You alone at noon seeking her
Bringing to her the spring of living water
Whoever drinks of it will never thirst..

¹⁸⁶ Hom 36. PG 59:206.

❖ Your modesty, love and gentleness made her forget the hostility between the Samaritans and the Jews.

Seeing You kindled her heart to worship God.

She trusted You and talked at length about worship!

She recognized You and gradually knew You

For she searched for You faithfully and You declared Yourself to her!

❖ O how wonderful, she never saw a miracle or sign,

But Your words attracted her wholly to enjoy redemption.

She confessed her personal secrets, because she found her spirit's bridegroom.

The five men she once had and the man she still has did not satisfy her.

She realized that the five Books of Moses

And the teachings she had

Will not quench her thirst.

You alone are the bridegroom of her spirit.

❖ She possessed You within herself

So her heart expanded with love for all mankind.

She left her water pot and without permission ran to her city.

With her heart on fire she was not ashamed to announce with great wisdom

"A man told me all things that I ever did.

Could this be the Christ?"

The whole city went out toward the wonderful bridegroom.

❖ She was not ordered to preach.

She was not trained in witnessing

But she did what no apostle or disciple did!

With her love she attracted the whole city

And when they met You they refused to learn from any other but You.

They announced firmly what Your disciples did not

We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.

❖ You are truly the Savior of the world.

You grant healing and life.

O You who have raised the nobleman's son as from death!

Raise my poor spirit

To enjoy You who are the source of life and joy.



Chapter 5

Healing of the Bethesda Sick Man The Divine Physician

In this chapter we find the meeting between the Lord Jesus Christ, the Heavenly Physician, and the man of Bethesda who had suffered from paralysis for 38 years. Christ is a Unique Physician who seeks the sick person without his asking but does not heal him forcibly. He rather asks him, "Do you want to be made well?" Christ met the man at Bethesda that had five porches which indicate the five Books of Moses, or the Law. The Law reveals sin and affirms to us sickness and our need for a Heavenly Physician who can heal.

The Physician discloses the good characteristics in the sick man. He is modest: for when the Lord asked him "Do you want to be made well?", he was not angry but in wonderful docility, he answered "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." (5:7) When a person suffers from an infirmity for a long time, he is usually afflicted by strange difficulties that grow with time. However, in this case we see an extremely calm man. Besides, when the Lord said to him "Rise, take up your bed and walk" (5:8) this man believed and immediately got up, walked, and carried his bed. He had lain by the pool since before the Nativity of Jesus Christ the Lord. He probably had not heard of Christ because he was almost deprived of seeing his relatives and friends after all that time of illness. Yet, he did not argue with the Lord. He did not ask how he could rise, how he could at once walk and carry his bed.

The human arm was incapable of healing this paralytic cast by the pool for 38 years. Jesus Christ the Lord intervened asking him, "Do you want to be made well?" Christ gave him a new life at Bethesda which means "The house of mercy."

This miracle is not mentioned in the other three Gospels because St. John was interested in the miracles that occurred in Jerusalem while the other Evangelists were more concerned with those that took place in Galilee.

1. The Bethesda Paralytic Is Healed 1-9
2. Resistance of the Jews 10-16
3. Christ's Comment about the Sabbath 17-18 Christ's Talk about the Sabbath
4. Discourse about Eternal Life 19-30
5. John the Baptist Bears Witness to Christ 31-35
6. The Testimony of Christ's Miracles and Works 36
7. The Father Testifies of Him 37
8. The Holy Bible Testifies of Him 38-47

1. The Bethesda Paralytic Is Healed

"After this there was a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem" [1]

Several Fathers of the Church and contemporary scholars see that the circumstances mentioned in this chapter show that this was the Passover. The interest of the other three Evangelists in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ in Judea is very brief. They do not refer to the Passover feasts which occurred after the Lord's baptism and until His crucifixion. Whereas St. John refers to all those feasts: the first in 2:13, the second here 5:1, the third 6:4 and the fourth 13:1. However, he does not say here explicitly that it was the Passover; he says "a feast of the Jews."

When the feast took place, the Lord Jesus Christ went up to Jerusalem although He lived in Galilee. The Law decrees that men should go up to Jerusalem for the feast. Therefore, Christ did not want to exempt Himself since He accepted to be the Son of Man who is under the Law. In doing that He offers to us Himself as a model concerned in community worship, even though many practice it as a formality lacking in spirit.

If wisdom cries in public places (Proverbs 1:21), here Wisdom goes up to Jerusalem where many Jews from many parts of the world come and also where strangers come, so that He may announce to them the Truth, especially that they came for worship and are ready to accept and understand the truth.

As the word "feast" is mentioned without the definite article (the), some scholars say that it was not the Passover, but rather the Pentecost which commemorates receiving the Law. Both St. Cyril the Great and St. John Chrysostom are of this opinion. The reason some think this was the Feast of Pentecost is that the Lord Jesus Christ talked about the meaning of Sabbath and blamed them for not believing Moses, for if they did they would have believed Him because the Law testifies of Him (45-47)

St. John Chrysostom comments on the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ went up to Jerusalem saying: [In most cases He went up to the city, on the one hand to appear among them during the feast, and on the other hand, to attract to Him those who were without malice, because the simple people gathered during those days more than any other time.]¹⁸⁷

It seems that the Lord Jesus Christ went up to Jerusalem alone. His disciples were not with Him, so that He may enter without being seen. This is clear because the paralytic did not know Him for as soon as He healed the man, Christ withdrew from the multitude. [13]

**Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool
Which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda Having five porches [2]**

He speaks of the pool and the five porches as existing at the time he was writing this Gospel. Some people opine that the pool and its porches were not destroyed along with the temple and the destruction of Jerusalem. Some others deduce in many versions of the narration that the pool did not exist. The pool has been discovered recently and it is beside the church of St. Hannah. The excavations have shown that the pool is surrounded by a rectangle in which are four porches and a fifth channel

¹⁸⁷ *Homilies on St. John, 36:1*

dividing the pool in half.

Bethesda is not Bethsaida as it is written in some versions. The Hebrew word for it is Bethchasaday which means "the house of mercy." It may have taken its name from God's mercies that were revealed in the healing of those who stepped down into it.

"The Sheep Gate": this gate was probably called so because the priests used to wash down the sacrificial lambs there then take them into the temple.

The pool indicates the baptismal font where the believers enjoy a new birth and a healing from sin.

The five porches indicate the law recorded in the five Books of Moses. The sick enter through them to the pool so that those who enter realize that they are in need of a Heavenly Physician.

The angel coming down from heaven indicates the Word of God Incarnated, the Heavenly Physician.

The healing of one person indicates the One Church that enjoys healing from sin.

The stirring up of the water indicates the suffering of Christ when the crowd rose against Him. Moreover, the stirring up of the water means that the water in the pool became a flowing living water, similar to the water of baptism in which the Spirit works and the baptized is born spiritually as the Lord Jesus Christ declares to Nicodemus [John 3]. Again it indicates the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Lord says to the Samaritan woman that whoever drinks of that water will never thirst.

- ❖ That water was the Jewish nation. The five porches were the law because Moses wrote five Books. Therefore the water was enclosed with five porches, just as the Jews were controlled by the law. The agitation of the water is the suffering of the Lord among the people. The person who stepped down into the water and was healed is one person because this is the oneness.

Those who refuse Christ's suffering are proud. They do not step down, so they are not healed. They say "far be it from me that I believe that God was incarnate, born of a woman, and that He was crucified, and scourged, that He died, was wounded, and was buried. Far be it from me that I believe that this is of God; this does not befit God." Let the heart speak, and not the stiff neck: For the proud, the Lord's meekness seems unsuitable to Him. Therefore, enjoying health is far from them. If you want to be healed you must step down.¹⁸⁸

- ❖ Be alert, beloved, because the Law was given for this aim: to reveal sickness, not to heal it. Thus, this sick flock could have been sick at home in great secrecy if the five porches did not exist. By entering through the five porches they became known to human eyes, but the porches did not heal them.
- ❖ So the Law is useful in revealing sins, because a person becomes much more guilty when he transgresses the Law. In that case, his pride is restrained, and

¹⁸⁸ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 74:3*

he seeks the help of Him Who is merciful. Listen to the apostle: "the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." (Romans 5:20) And in another place, "where there is no law there is no transgression." (Romans 4:15) A person may be called a sinner before the Law is known, but it is impossible to call him a transgressor. However, if he sins after he receives the Law, he will be not only a sinner, but also a transgressor. And if transgression is added to sin "sin abounds." When sin abounds, human pride learns at last to submit and to confess to God saying, "I am weak." Saint Augustine¹⁸⁹

- ❖ The time of offering baptism was near. Baptism conveys great strength and is the greatest of the blessings. It appears like an image through the pool and the accompanying circumstances... for God wants to take us closer to the faith by baptism. Therefore baptism does not only wash dirt but also heals sickness. St. John Chrysostom.¹⁹⁰

**"In these lay a great multitude of sick people,
Blind, lame, paralyzed, Waiting for the moving of the water." [3]**

He mentions, among the sick, only three groups: the blind, the lame and the paralyzed. Those are the disabled who cannot step down into the water. For this reason a great number of those people gathered in the five porches round the pool.

**"For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool
and stirred up the water,
then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of
whatever disease he had." [4]**

Some writers believe that the angel did not go down into the pool every day, but rather during certain seasons, especially the three great feasts. This, God allowed so that the people may be sure that, though they were deprived of prophets and miracles, God did not forget them but cared for them.

Some observe that this event began after Eliashib, the high priest, built a wall in the direction of Jerusalem and sanctified it with prayer. Consequently God gave evidence of His acceptance of that by the miraculous works at the pool. Others believe that those miracles began with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Still others say they began with His baptism. Dr. Lightfoot states that the historian Josephus reports that in the seventh year of Herod, that is thirty years before the Lord Jesus Christ, there was a great earthquake. Seeing that the descent of angels is sometimes accompanied by an earthquake, this may have been the first year when the angel began to go down into the pool. And some writers believe that that stopped with the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. John writes "went down" in the past tense. This makes it clear that that occurrence had stopped at the time the Gospel according to St. John was being written. Whereas he speaks of the pool as still existing at his time.

The fact that there is not explicit mention of the miracles at the pool either in

¹⁸⁹ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 75:2*

¹⁹⁰ *Homilies on St. John, 36:1*

Josephus, Philo or any other Jewish writer, indicates that those happenings did not occur for a long time, or that they did not occur at the time of those writers.

Bathing a person, especially at a public place, by quickly casting him into the water, would generally cause that person harm. However, in this case, the person is sick, and yet no matter what his disease was, he was made well if he was the first to step down into the water.

- ❖ For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water [4]. And he granted with him power of healing so that the Jews learn that the God of angels can, moreover, heal the sickness of the spirit.

And just as the nature of the water, here, did not heal of itself (because if it did it would have healed at all times) but healed through the work of the angel, similarly, our purification is not by means of the water simply, but through the grace of the Spirit that is accepted and absolves us from all our sins. St. John Chrysostom¹⁹¹.

- ❖ One person only was healed. This shows unity: whoever came after that was not cured, because no one outside that unity is made well. St. Augustine¹⁹².

"Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years." [5]

This sick man spent more than half his life beside the pool suffering paralysis and unable to live in a habitual daily way. Good health is a talent that we must use as long as we have it and we must offer our thanks to God for it.

Someone may ask, why did not Christ heal all the sick in Bethesda with just a word from His mouth? He is the Physician of the souls and bodies but what preoccupies Him most is the eternal healing where the bodies along with the souls are glorified. This sick man was usually among many sick people at the pool; they knew him and many of their relatives and friends also knew him; and may be the whole city knew him. Therefore, his healing opened the eyes of all to see the person of the Messiah, so that all may enjoy the faith and be glorified eternally.

The healing of this sick man was, and still is, at the bottom of the healing of many broken, desperate souls. If the Lord had made all the sick people there well with one word, this would have seemed a show of divine miraculous work. However, the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ was preoccupied with the faith of all and their spiritual healing first.

- ❖ He entered a place where a judge number of the sick flock lay: the blind, lame and paralyzed. And as He is the Physician of the souls and bodies and He came to make the souls of all believers well, He chose from that flock one person to heal him to indicate oneness... in spite of the fact that He could have raised all.¹⁹³
- ❖ This pool and that water seem to denote the Jewish population (Revelation 17:15) That water, that is to say the Jewish people, was shut into the five

¹⁹¹ *Homilies on St. John, 36:1*

¹⁹² *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:3*

¹⁹³ *St. Augustine: One the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:1*

Books of Moses, or the five porches. These Books bring in the sick but do not make them well. The Law judges the sinners but does not make them well. That is why the letter without grace makes men sinners and those sinners, if they confess, they are saved.

This is what the apostle says: "For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law." (Galatians 3:21) He completes, "But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." (Galatians 3:22) What promise is greater than this? Do not those words explain the five porches and the sick flock?¹⁹⁴

- ❖ In the number 40 there is an implication of perfection of righteousness: a life of struggle, trouble, self control, fasts and tribulation. This is the practice of righteousness: that you endure and reject this world, and not only abstain from food for the body. This is what we seldom do. As for refraining from loving this world, this is what we must always practice. Thus the law saves those who forbear this world because they cannot love the eternal unless they stop loving the temporal... The concern is man's love; consider it the soul's hand, if it holds something it cannot hold another thing and so that it may be able to hold what it is given, it must leave what it actually holds.

The perfection of righteousness (according to the law) is shown in the number 40. What completes the number 40? That man controls his love of this world. He must control his love of temporal matter which may destroy him... For this reason the Lord fasted forty days, and so did Moses and Elijah. He Who gave His two servants the power to fast for forty days, could He not fast 80 days or a hundred? Then why did He not fast more than He granted His servants to do, except that in that number 40 is the mystery of fasting and renunciation of this world?... What does the apostle say: "the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14) The number 40 is complete.

Why is there perfection of righteousness in the number 40?

It is said in the Psalms "I will sing a new song to You, O God; On a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You." (Psalm 144:9) The harp indicates the ten commandments which are the law which the Lord came, not to destroy but to fulfill. And it is clear that the law itself throughout the world has four directions, east, west, south and north as the Scripture says... Therefore, the number 40 is renunciation of the world; it is the implementation of the law. Now love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:14) However the commandment of love is double "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart... and the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself" Whoever fails to achieve these two commandments has the weakness of the number 38. St. Augustine¹⁹⁵.

- ❖ Number 40 attracts our attention as a sacred number of perfection. What I suggest is well known to you, beloved, because the Holy Bible testifies often to this truth. In that fasting this number of days is, as you know, good. Moses fasted forty days, and so did Elijah and many others. Our Lord and Savior

¹⁹⁴ St. Augustine: *ON the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:2*

¹⁹⁵ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 75:7-10*

Jesus Christ Himself completed this number in fast. Moses represents the law; Elijah represents the prophets, and the Lord the Gospel. For this reason all three appeared on the mountain: The Lord manifested Himself to His disciples in the glory of His shining face and clothes. He appeared in the middle between Moses and Elijah as testimony of the law, the prophets and the Gospel¹⁹⁶.

- ❖ The patience of the paralytic is amazing because he remained thirty-eight years waiting every year to be freed from his sickness. He stood fast and did not leave the place. Contemplate this man who remained paralytic for thirty-eight years seeing, every year, other people healed of their diseases and looking at himself tied down by his paralysis, and yet not despairing. St. John Chrysostom
- ❖ What does the angel announce by this symbol, except that he declares the descent of the Holy Spirit who in our days passes and sanctifies the water when He is called upon through the prayers of the priest? This angel was the ambassador of the Holy Spirit since it is through the grace of the Spirit that the medicine acts in the weaknesses of the soul and mind. Thus, like God the Father and Christ, the Spirit also has the same servants. He fills all; all things; all acts in all in the same way as the acting God the Father and the Son. St. Ambrose¹⁹⁷.

Bede observes that 38 is 40 minus 2. If 40 indicates the perfection of virtues and it is 10x4, that is to say the perfection of the law (10) and the four Gospels (4), then the absence of 2 which are concerned with the love of God and of the neighbor reveals a man in fact being sick for a long time. Such people can correct their depravity through the gift of the Holy Spirit when the Spirit shakes their lethargy so they hurry and carry the burden of brotherly love so that they may see their Creator.

**When Jesus saw him lying there,
And knew that he already had been in that condition a long time,
He said to him, "Do you want to be made well? [6]**

When the Lord Jesus Christ went up to Jerusalem, He did not visit the castles of the rich. He visited the hospitals to offer His love and mercy to the sick. For He came to the world for the sake of the needy and the sick. The Lord may have concentrated on this particular sick man because he had been at that place sick and deprived for a longer time than the others. The Lord rejoices in serving those who have no hope or support.

"Do you want to be made well?!" with that question Christ wanted to arouse in the man faith, hope, and the strong desire to be made well. The Lord Jesus Christ addresses the same question to every soul that may be longing for healing through the heavenly Physician of souls.

- ❖ The Lord Jesus Christ did not say to the paralytic, "Do you want Me to make you well?" That is because the man did not yet see the great figure of Christ. So Christ's question was "Do you want to be made well?"
- ❖ He asked him this question, not because He wanted to know (that the man

¹⁹⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:4-8*

¹⁹⁷ *Of the Holy Spirit Book I: 7:88*

wanted to be cured). The Lord did not need that; He rather wanted to point out the man's perseverance and that it was for this reason that He left the others and came to this man.

The perseverance of the paralytic is amazing. He hoped for every year of the thirty-eight years, to be healed of his disease. He continued lying down and did not withdraw from the pool...

We should be ashamed, beloved, we should be ashamed and sigh over our extreme languor.

He kept waiting for thirty-eight years without getting what he hoped; yet in spite of that he did not retreat. He did not fail because of negligence on his part. He failed, rather, because of the jostling, the violence and the trouble of the others. All that did not cause him to be apathetic. Whereas, we, if we persevered in prayer for ten days for a certain request and did not obtain it, our zeal declines. St. John Chrysostom¹⁹⁸.

**"The sick man answered Him,
'Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up;
but while I am coming, another steps down before me.'" [7]**

In what he says about the paralyzed (Matthew 9:2) who was healed by the Lord Jesus Christ, St. John Chrysostom stresses the meekness of this paralytic. Usually, when a person lies in his bed for all those years, he is furious and suffers from psychological and nervous trouble. Nevertheless, when this man heard the question of the Lord Jesus Christ, he did not angrily say, "Don't you see me watching for the angel to come down to stir the water? How can you ask me if I wanted to be made well?" Instead, he answered the Lord Jesus Christ with amazing docility.

The sick man complained that he had no friends to help him. Even those who were healed went away in good health and met their relatives and friends. Not one of them was concerned about this poor man. He also complained that he was unable to compete with the others so that he may be the first to throw himself into the pool, for many stepped down into the water before him.

In the past when interest was in human beings instead of in the Messiah as the Physician and the Medicine for cure, it was said "is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" (Jeremiah 8:22) This is the complaint of the paralytic: he does not find anybody who would heal him or give him medicine. And yet, here is the Balm Himself, the Physician Himself standing in front of him granting him Himself the Mystery of Recovery.

The paralytic was looking for a man to throw him into the pool when the angel comes down, so that he may obtain recuperation. And here is the Father Himself asking a Man able to act with justice and the pursuit of truth to descend to the world and forgive the world's sins. The Father, then found no such Man but His Word Incarnate. The Lord says, "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and

¹⁹⁸ *Homilies on St. John, 36:2*

know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it." (Jeremiah 5:1) He also says, "And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor" (Isaiah 59:16)

- ❖ Listen to the words of this paralytic and consider his great sorrow. Who is more deserving of pity than he who says these words? Have you seen a heart broken because of a long illness? Have you known how provoked by oppression he is? Yet, he did not blaspheme as most people do in their adversity. He did not curse his day, nor did he think the question was difficult to answer. He did not say to Christ, "Have you come to make fun of me, since you ask me if I want to be made well?" But he said in great humility, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool." In spite of the fact that he did not know who was asking him that question, nor did he feel that that Person intended to heal him, he just described his whole condition meekly and did not demand anything more. He seemed like a patient merely describing his illness to his physician.
- ❖ Now, no angel stirs the water; the Lord of the angels does everything. The sick cannot say, "I have no man"; he cannot say "while I am coming, another steps down before me" [7] For though it is necessary that He comes to the whole world, Grace is not consumed; the Powers do not cease, but remain as great as ever. Just as a ray of the sun gives light every day and yet is not used up and its light does not decrease, so is even more the power of the Spirit that does not in any way diminish through the grace given to many. St. John Chrysostom¹⁹⁹.
- ❖ But who makes the sick well? He who descends into the pool. And when does the sick step down into the pool? When the angel gives the sign by stirring the water. So was that pool sanctified when the angel came down and stirred up the water. The people saw the water stirring and so they realized that the angel was present. And if anyone then stepped into the pool, he was healed. Why was not this sick man healed? Let us consider his own words. He says "I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." [7] Couldn't you step down after someone stepped down before you? It is evident here that one person only was healed when the water stirred. He who stepped down first was the only one healed. St. Augustine²⁰⁰.

**Jesus said to him,
"Rise, take up your bed and walk." [8]**

The Lord offered him recuperation in a manner that did not occur to his mind. It was not by putting him into the pool when the water was stirred up, but by a word proceeding from His divine mouth. He commanded with power and the sick man was healed.

The Lord was accustomed to leave a sign after a miracle so that His people may remember His works of love. Thus, when he fed the crowds, He ordered His disciples to take up the fragments. Also when He changed water into wine, He told the servants

¹⁹⁹ *Homilies on St. John, 36:1*

²⁰⁰ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 75:3*

to take it to the reclining guests. Again, when He healed the lepers, He ordered them to go and show themselves to the priests to testify to their healing. Here, in this miracle, He asks the sick man to take up the bed which carried him during his sickness.

He asked him to take up the bed to be sure that his cure was complete and that he did not obtain physical strength gradually, but immediately through God's word and command. This is the cry of the Savior on the cross as He looks upon the whole church across the ages since Adam to the end: to rise, move and enter into the Father's bosom, the heavenly home. Christ asks the church to take up the bed, that is to share the cross with Him not as a burden carried on the back, but as a throne carrying the church and as glory pouring on it. Isaiah the prophet saw this outstanding image as being the joyful story of salvation and he sang: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." (Isaiah 60:1) The believing human race does not any more lie under the broken power of sin but rather enjoys the strength of the spirit to carry with the crucified bridegroom His cross the secret of power for salvation and to experience the glory of the Savior.

The story of the healing of this paralytic was linked with baptism since the early church. It was mentioned in some old baptism liturgies and was pictured in some Roman vaults to illustrate the power of baptism. The paralytic is shown as unable to walk; then he gets up carrying his bed on his back in an energetic, full of life way. A glorious picture about the work of baptism that raises the believer from an incurable illness to testify to the new life that has become his in Jesus Christ who rose from the dead.

- ❖ "Jesus" means "Savior", but in Greek, it means "the healer" for He is the physician of the spirits and bodies. He is the healer of the spirits: He opened the eyes of the born blind, and He guided the minds to the light. He cures the visibly paralyzed and leads the sinners to the path of repentance. He says to the paralytic: "Sin no more" and also "Take up your bed and walk" for the body was paralyzed because of the spirit's sin. Christ served the soul first so that the healing extends to the body.

Therefore, if one of us suffers in his self because of his sins, he will find Christ is his physician, and if one of you has little faith, he must say "help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24)

And if one of you feels physical pain, he must not be an unbeliever, he must rather come closer to Jesus who cures such an illness; and he must know that Jesus is the Christ. St. Cyril of Jerusalem²⁰¹.

- ❖ "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2) Now the law of Christ is love and love will not be fulfilled unless we bear the burdens of others. He says, "with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:2-3)

²⁰¹ Article 10:13

When you were weak your neighbor carried you. Now that you are well, you must endure your neighbor. In this way you complete, O man, what was lacking in you. So "take up your bed" and when you take it up do not stand still, but rather "walk." Through your love for your neighbor and through carrying your neighbor you complete your walk. To what place do you walk in the path of the Lord God who commands us to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind? You must carry your neighbor, then as you walk you will go to Him with whom you wish to dwell. Therefore, "take up your bed and walk." Saint Augustine²⁰².

**"And immediately the man was made well,
took up his bed and walked.
And that day was the Sabbath." [9]**

Why did the Lord order that man to take up his bed on the Sabbath, when the Law forbids such work, especially carrying heavy matter (Exodus 20:8, Jeremiah 17:21, Nehemiah 13:15)?

- A. This man may have been poor and if he left his bed he would have lost it. Besides he could not remain guarding his bed until the morning.
 - B. The Lord has shown that the Jews misunderstood the meaning of Sabbath. They observed it literally missing the right spiritual meaning that it is for the glory of God and the benefit of man.
 - C. Christ was emphasizing to those who were present that He is Lord of the Sabbath. All days are His without any preference between Saturday and any other day. He does the work of the Father continuously.
 - D. By carrying this bed in the middle of the religious capital and among the people coming to celebrate the feast, this man will attract the attention of the multitude. They will investigate the matter and become acquainted with the love of Christ for His people and His care for their spiritual and physical security more than for the literal observance of the law.
 - E. Christ is here testing the extent of obedience and belief of the sick man whom He has healed.
 - F. So that this may be a practical living picture of the church in the Christian era. For the prophets looked at the church in the new epoch and sang: "The Lord raises those who are bowed down" (Psalm 146:8) "O Lord, save thy people... and with them the blind and the lame" (Jeremiah 31:7-8). Therefore all the days of the church are Sabbath (rest) continuously and a joyful continual feast.
- ❖ Observe the faith of this paralytic: when he heard Christ's saying, "Rise, take up your bed and walk", he did not laugh; he got up and became well. He did not disobey but rather took up his bed and walked. Saint John Chrysostom.

2. Resistance of the Jews

**The Jews therefore said to him who was cured:
"It is the Sabbath.
It is not lawful for you to carry your bed." [10]**

²⁰² *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:9*

The leaders of the Jews argued with him and accused him of breaking the Sabbath. He defiled the Sabbath and as he did that openly and deliberately in the middle of the town, he deserved to be stoned to death. They did not realize that it was their envy and hatred of the Lord Christ that defiled their Sabbath and feasts. The Lord Christ went to the paralytic to grant him a new life and new possibilities. But the authorities call the man to find a pretext for his death. As the Psalmist says, "The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him" (Psalm 37:32)

He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk'" [11]

The answer of the sick man is a testimony for the Lord Christ. The man says, "He who made me well said to me take up your bed and walk." The man does not place the responsibility on the Lord Christ; nor does he wish to change the accusation of breaking the Sabbath. He only stresses the fact that It is impossible for Him who has the power to heal in this sovereign manner to make a mistake or do evil. The man means to say, "I obeyed Him because I trust in His holiness and righteousness."

He who has authority over chronic illnesses in such a supernatural way, cannot be considered breaking the law. He who has such love and mercy must necessarily observe the law which is accomplished through practical love.

The vitality that the man gained was immeasurably more precious than the literal observance of the Sabbath. He, therefore, left the interpretation of observing the Sabbath to Him Who gave him that new life in which he enjoyed tranquility.

- ❖ Because it was the Sabbath, the Jews were angry, in ignorance, since they were sick with coarse literalness they were, in their clinging stupidity, more shackled than the paralytic. Their minds were paralyzed, their behavior weak, they were truly those to whom was said, "Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees." (Isaiah 35:3) But they were furiously angry claiming that even He who granted the law must necessarily honor it. St. Cyril, the Great²⁰³.
- ❖ The paralytic did not disobey Christ. Consequently he was immediately healed, and he took up his bed and walked. After that, what he did was even much more important. When he accepted what Christ told him at the beginning, that was not surprising, for he had no one to help him. However, when the Jews surrounded him, madly blaming him and besieged him saying, "it is not lawful for you to carry your bed", he did not listen to their madness, but in clear frank words proclaimed his benefactor in the midst of their synagogue. Listen to what he said to them: "He who made me well said to me, 'take up your bed and walk'" He was almost saying to them: you are mad to order me not to consider Him a teacher, He Who relieved me of my long sickness, and you ask me not to obey all his commands.

Nevertheless, if the paralytic wished to offend them, it would have been possible for him to answer in a different way. As, for example, say: if what I am doing is wrong, it is not my fault but the mistake of him who ordered me to do so. Yet, he did not say

that, nor did he beg their pardon. On the contrary, in a glorious voice he acknowledged the charity granted to him and announced in clear strong words, "He who made me well said to me, take up your bed and walk." St. John Chrysostom.

"Then they asked him, Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk?'" [12]

Whit that question they tried to insult the Lord Christ not only by supposing Him a mere man, but by asking scornfully "Who is the Man...?" meaning there is no comparison between that man who cured you and God who instituted the law.

- ❖ Reflect on how full of scheming were their words. They did not ask the paralytic who healed him. They said nothing about that; instead they mentioned the act which they considered a sin and said, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'take up your bed and walk'" St. John Chrysostom.

"But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place." [13]

He may have heard the name of Jesus, but as he lay by the pool for 38 years he had not seen the Lord and had not known much about Him. He was not even able to recognize Him if he saw Him.

Saint Augustine considers that God rested on the seventh day is an allusion to the completion of the work of redemption on the cross on the sixth day (Friday) and His rest in the tomb on the seventh day²⁰⁴.

- ❖ It is difficult to see Christ in the multitude, therefore, solitude is necessary for our minds. In solitary meditation it is possible to see God. A multitude is full of noise. Vision requires secrecy. Do not search for Christ in a crowd; He is not like one among a crowd; He is above all the crowd. It is true that the Lord saw him in the multitude; however He knew him in the temple. The man came to the Lord; he saw Him in the temple; he saw Him in the consecrated sacred place. Saint Augustine²⁰⁵.
- ❖ The Lord announces openly that the secret of the Sabbath as a sign to keep one day was given to the Jews temporarily. But the completion of the secret was realized in Christ Himself. Saint Augustine²⁰⁶.
- ❖ If you say: what was Christ's aim in hiding Himself? I shall answer: Christ hid Himself so that the testimony may not be dubious. AS the paralytic who now enjoyed good health has become a witness for the charity he has received, he is fit to be believed. On the other hand, the Lord did not want to inflame the anger of the Jews even more. For by merely looking at that person those who envied him were ablaze. Therefore, the Lord withdrew and left the work He did speak for itself to them. The Lord did not talk about Himself. He let them talk to the man who was cured and to those who were interested. Saint John Chrysostom.

²⁰⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:15*

²⁰⁵ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:11*

²⁰⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:13*

**"Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him:
See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."
[14]**

When that man felt how merciful God was to him, he went to the temple probably to thank God for healing him. It was as though he was singing
"I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving,
And will call upon the name of the Lord.
I will pay my vows to the Lord
Now in the presence of all His people.
In the courts of the Lord's house,
In the midst of you O Jerusalem." (Psalm 116:17-19)

This probably happened the same day he was cured.

The Lord Christ met the man in the temple. It may be that as they accused Him of despising the Sabbath, He came to the temple to stress His sanctification of the Sabbath and His preoccupation with collective prayer on that day. He came in particular to grant spiritual insight, notwithstanding His knowledge that His numerous enemies wanted to kill Him. Nevertheless, since there was an urgent need to meet a person to build him, Christ did not refrain from going for this man's sake. He has healed the sick man's body, and now He will declare His interest in healing the man's soul from sin.

The Lord Christ made it clear for the man that He knew the secrets of the past: "Sin no more", thus explaining that the man's past sin was the cause of his long illness. The Lord warns against sin that leads to the hospital, the Bethesda pool, to spend 38 years; or rather to hell to be shut off eternally in deprivation from the heavenly glory and in suffering with the enemy of good, Satan.

Sometimes, we have some sickness because of our sins. This is a divine punishment so that we return to God. As the Psalmist says:

"Fools, because of their transgression,
And because of their iniquities, were afflicted.
Their soul abhorred all manner of food
And they drew near to the gates of death.
Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
And He saved them out of their distresses." (Psalm 107:17-19)

Notice that the Lord does not refer to the sins at the time He cures the sick, except in the incurable cases, when the illness lasts for a long time as in this case and as in the situation mentioned in Mark 2:5. It may be that because those who lived a long time in sickness thought that having no dealings with people, they are righteous without sin. Therefore He asks them to penetrate deeper in their souls to discover the weakness of their nature and return to God. Such people are in need of greater watchfulness than the others who realize they are sinners.

This may be what Christ said to that man in the temple. As he was deprived of visiting

the temple for 38 years during his illness, he may be restricted by the building, by meeting people and by what takes place around him. Therefore, Christ wanted to turn the man's eyes to his own depth to beware of sin in his new life. Indeed, I do not think any language can express the feelings of that man when he saw the temple after all those years. May this longing be combined with the meeting with God who dwells in the depth of the soul!

- ❖ When we are baptized we are told "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."²⁰⁷ ST. Jerome.
- ❖ It is a simple matter that you obtain something; but it is more important that you are able to keep what you obtain. Faith itself and the honored birth are full of beneficial life not by being obtained but by being preserved. Perseverance to the end, and not the temporary practice of that, keeps the human being for God directly. Solomon, Saul and many others as they did not continue to the end in the path of the Lord, they were not able to maintain the grace conferred upon them. When Christ's disciple withdraws from the Way, the blessing of Christ also abandons him²⁰⁸. St. Cyrian.
- ❖ Someone asks, "What then, is sin the cause of every illness?" No. Not all diseases but some. Some are brought about by a kind of carelessness and negligence such as excessive eating (gluttony), addiction and sloth which cause pain. Jesus wanted to secure this man's future... keeping him in good health with the benefit He offered to him and with fear of future illnesses²⁰⁹.
- ❖ Not only by giving the sick man's body power, but rather in another manner He gave him a strong proof of His divinity. When He says to him "Sin no more." He shows him that He knows all his past trespasses. In this way he can obtain his faith in the future²¹⁰. St. John Chrysostom.

"The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who made him well." [15]

He did not say that the Lord Christ was responsible because it was He who told him 'take up your bed.' He rather testified for Him that it was He "Who made him well." He wished to glorify Jesus and, at the same time, to testify for the benefit of his hearers, maybe they think seriously about His miraculous deed.

"For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath." [16]

Instead of reconsidering their opinion concerning Jesus the savior of souls and healer of bodies from incurable diseases, their jealousy and envy led them to the desire of practicing their father's work: persecution and murder. They found no satisfaction except in bloodshed. Their zeal in sanctifying the Sabbath was to cover up their feelings full of hatred.

3. Christ's Discourse about the Sabbath

"But Jesus answered them:

²⁰⁷ *Against the Pelagians 3:1*

²⁰⁸ *Letter 13 to Rogation, the priest and to other confessors: 1*

²⁰⁹ *Hom 38. PG 59:217-218*

²¹⁰ *Homilies on St. John, 38*

**'My Father has been working until now,
and I have been working.'" [17]**

The Lord Christ began a dialogue with the authorities who accused Him of breaking the Sabbath. This discourse was probably in the presence of the Sanhedrim on the same day, or two or three days after the sick man was made well.

By saying, "My Father has been working until now" [17] He makes it clear for them that the Father created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath. He stopped His work of creation because He had completed everything. However His rest does not mean ignoring His creation. In His Sabbath He continues caring for His creation, shepherding it and managing its affairs. The Sabbath for God is work in which there is rest and joy inasmuch as He declares His love for His greatly beloved creation. If God practised the Sabbath literally like the Jewish authorities, the universe would have stopped and been estroyed because it cannot remain without divine help. Thus, the Son sanctifies the Sabbath with the continuous work of love as He cares for His beloved. HE works continuously so that all may be made well and grow in knowledge and glory. This is the meaning of the Sabbath according to the divine standard.

On the Sabbath day the male child is circumcised if he is, on that day, eight days old. On the Sabbath the priests offer sacrifices, and on the Sabbath day the shepherds give water to their sheep. All these acts do not break the Sabbath because they carry the fragrance of love. The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath because He is "Love" itself.

"And I have been working": As He is the Son of God, He practices His Father's way Who works perpetually for the sake of His people. To stop from work of love is to break the Sabbath and corrupt it. On the other hand, to do an act of love is to sanctify the Sabbath. He has not been working like His Father as though each has His own future work. He, rather, has been working with His Father; for "All things were made through Him." Therefore, if he is accused of breaking the Sabbath, this accusation is directed towards God the Father Himself who is never separate from the Son.

The Lord Christ compares Himself to the Father: just as the Father works on the Sabbath day as on other days, so Christ can do the same. This comparison has its danger for the Jewish leaders because it conveys the meaning of equality between Jesus and the Father in the divine plan and work. Who is He who treats the subjects of the Father and the Sabbath as associated with Him?

Saint Augustine observes that the Jews were wrong in understanding the Sabbath in a corporeal way. They thought that God created the world in six days; that He got tired and wanted to be relieved from exertion on the seventh day and He, therefore sanctified that day for rest. This misinterpretation caused trouble to them. However, the spiritual meaning of the Sabbath is that when the six days, or human historical periods, pass, the day of the Lord comes being the seventh day. His rest means our rest also. As for the six days, they are:

- The first day: from Adam to Noah.
- The second day: from the Flood to Abraham.

- The third day: from Abraham to David.
- The fourth day: from David to the Babylonian captivity.
- The fifth day: from the Babylonian captivity to the coming of the Lord Christ.
- The sixth day: the present era from the coming of Christ to His last coming. On that day we take the image of God, since on that day man was created (Gen 1:27) and on that day our creation is renewed (through crucifixion on Friday).

This is how Saint Augustine sees that God works during the six days and that the sixth day is the day on which man was created and renewed to get ready for enjoying rest on the seventh day which is the day of His last coming²¹¹.

- ❖ So that we may know in a better way the equality of the Father and the Son, behold that when the Father speaks the Son works. Likewise the Father works and the Son speaks. The Father works, as it is written "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." You notice that it was said to the Son "speak a word, and my servant will be healed." (Matt 8:8) and the Son says to the Father, "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am" (John 17:24) so the Father does what the Son says. Saint Ambrose²¹².
- ❖ Surely, as the Church teaches us in accordance to the Savior's words: "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." God works (creates) our spirits everyday with which we increase and work; and He will not stop being the Creator²¹³.
- ❖ He gives continuously; He always grants gifts. It is not enough that He grants me a blessing once. It befits Him that He gives me grace at all times. I ask so that I may obtain and when I obtain I ask again. I crave for God's generosity and if He is not late in giving, I do not lack interest in accepting His gift. As much as I drink I thirst. Saint Jerome²¹⁴.
- ❖ If someone asks you, how has the Father been working, He who has ended His work on the seventh day? If only he learns the manner with which He works. What are His works? He cares for the concerns of everything He did and He directs them. When you see the sun rising and the moon turning in its orb; when you see the lakes, springs and rivers, rain and the natural seasons for plants, the nature of our body and the body of undiscerning animals and all other matter with which this universe exists you will learn that God has not stopped working. For, "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt. 5:45) He also "clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven" (Matt 6:30) and when He speaks about the birds He says, "your heavenly Father feeds them." Saint John Chrysostom²¹⁵.
- ❖ He said that to them because they kept the Sabbath in a corporeal sense imagining God as though He slept after He tired of creating the world until that day. He sanctified that day He began to rest as from weariness.

²¹¹ 1 Cf. *Sermon on N.T. Lessons*, 75:4-6

²¹² 2 *On the Holy Spirit*, Book 2, *Jutr.* (2).

²¹³ 1 *To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem*, 22.

²¹⁴ 2 *Letter 133:6*

²¹⁵ 3 *Homilies on St. John*, 38:2

Now, concerning our old fathers, the mystery of the Sabbath has been established, that which we, Christians, observe spiritually by refraining from low work, that is to say from any sin, because the Lord says: "whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." We obtain repose in our hearts and this is the spiritual rest.

AS for the saying that God rested, that is because He did not create a new creation after He ended His work which He made.

In addition the Holy Bible calls it rest in order that we may be urged to do good works after which we rest. It is written in the Book of Genesis "God created everything, it was very good. And He rested on the seventh day" so that you may realize, O man, that it was said of God Himself that He rested after good work, and you may expect rest for yourself after you practice good work.

Since God, after creating man in His own image and likeness and in that He completed all His work which was very good, then He rested on the seventh day, it follows that you should not expect rest for yourself unless you return to that likeness when you were created²¹⁶.

- ❖ Do not think that My Father rested on the Sabbath means that He did not work. He is working even now and likewise I am working. And just as the Father is without fatigue, so is the Son without fatigue²¹⁷.
- ❖ The Universal faith (of the Universal Church) is that the works of the Father and the works of the Son are not separate... AS the Father and the Son are not separate, so are the works of the Father and the works of the son not separate... What the Father does the Son and the Holy Spirit also do. For, everything was made by the word, "For He spoke, and it was done."²¹⁸ Saint Augustine.

Some may ask: for example, that the Lord Christ walked on the water, while the Father did not walk on the water; how then do we say that the works of the Father and of the Son are not separate? Saint Augustine answers saying: "See how the Universal Faith presents an explanation for this question: The Son walked on the sea; He put His physical feet on the waves, the body walked and the Divinity directed it, but when the body walked and the Divinity directed it, was the Father absent? If He was absent, how does the Son say, 'but the Father who dwells in Me does the works'? If the Father who dwells in the Son, He Himself does the works, then walking on the water is the work of the Father by the Son. Consequently, this walking is the work of the Father and the Son without separation. I see both working in it. The Father will not leave the Son, nor will the Son leave the Father. Thus all that the Father works, He does not work without the Son because what the Father does He does not do without the Son."²¹⁹

- ❖ Someone says: how does the eternal give birth to an eternal? As temporary flame produces temporary light, the generating flame is contemporaneous with the light that it generates. The generating flame will not precede the light in

²¹⁶ 1 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 20:2*

²¹⁷ 2. St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 20:2*

²¹⁸ 3. St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of ST. John, tractate 20:3*

²¹⁹ 1 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 20:6*

time, but from the moment the flame begins, at that same moment the light is born. Show me flame without light, and I will show you God the Father without the Son. Therefore, 'the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do.' This implies that 'He sees' and 'is born' concerning the Son are both the same thing. His seeing and existence are not different; nor are His strength and His Being different. All things that the Son has are from the Father, everything He has power over, or He is the same, everything is from the Father²²⁰.

- ❖ What the Father does, the Son also does. The Father made the world and the Son made the world, and also the Holy Spirit made the world. If they were three gods, there would have been three worlds. Since they are one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, there is one world that the Father created through the Son in the Holy Spirit. It follows that the Son makes what the Father makes and does not work in a different way. He makes together these matters and makes them in the same way²²¹.
- ❖ If you see no separation in the light, why do you want separation in the work? Behold God, look at the word that is inseparable from the word that He speaks. The speaker does not speak in syllables. His word shines in the splendor of wisdom. What was said about wisdom? "She is the radiance of eternal light" (Wis 9:15). Look at the sun in the sky. It spreads its splendor on all the earth and over all the seas, and yet the light is material and simple. If you can truly separate the splendor from the sun, you can separate the Word from the Father²²². Saint Augustine.

"Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God." [18]

His justification of the sanctity of the Sabbath through Divine work, and not through refraining from work, bore the testimony that He was equal with God whom He called His Father. Therefore, they hated him more, because there is nothing that incites them more than His assertion of His divine authority. Therefore they sought all the more to kill Him, because in their opinion He blasphemed. The punishment for both accusations is death (Exodus 31:14. Lev 24:16)

Some think that what alarmed the Jewish leaders was that He called the Father His personal self Father: This is what is understood by the use of the Greek word. He, then, considers Himself equal with God.

- ❖ It is written: "My Father is greater than I." (John 14:28) It is also written "He... did not consider it robbery to be equal with God" (Philippians 2:6). It is written "He... also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God." (John 5:18) and it is written: "I and My Father are one." (John 10:30) Is it possible that He is less and equal in the same nature? No, one refers to the Divinity, the other to His body²²³. Saint Ambrose.

²²⁰ 2 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 20:8*

²²¹ 3 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 20:9*

²²² 4 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 20:13*

²²³ 1 *Of the Christian Faith, Book, ch. 18 (224)*

4. Discourse about Eternal Life

**"Then Jesus answered and said to them,
Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself,
But what He sees the Father do;
For whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner." [19]**

In His speech He always asserts two truths: the oneness (unity) of God, and that He is one with the Father, equal with Him.

When the Jews wanted to kill Him not only because He broke the Sabbath, but also because He said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God [18] His answer was not 'Why do you want to kill me..., I am not equal with my Father.' If the Lord Christ was less than the Father in divinity, He would have been obligated to make that clear. However, He explained that there is not contradiction between Him and the Father, because what the Father does, He does through the Son who is the power and wisdom of God. "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." (John 1:3) He says what the Father sees the Son does; what does He mean by that? Does He see what the Father does and He repeats the same act? Impossible! However, as they both do the same work, so He is one with the Father in will. Therefore, He does the divine work which is according to His Father's pleasure and at the same time His own pleasure. The Son cannot do anything of Himself because of the unity that cannot be split from the Father. Alos, the Father does not do anything without the Son because of the eternal unity, because the Son is the power of God, the wisdom of God, the word of God.

The created bieng can do something of himself; he can misconceive the matter that God cannot do because He is holy without sin. But the Son cannot do except what He sees the Father do. It is as though He says to them, if you accuse Me of breaking the Sabbath, I do not do anything except what I see the Father do; would you consider the Father breaking the Sabbath?!

In His discourse He concentrated on that He gives life to whom He will [21], that His words grant everlasting life [24], that His voice will raise the dead [25-26] and that the hour is coming when He will give life to those in the graves [28-29]

- ❖ The Father shows Him what He will do so that what is done will be through the Son²²⁴.
- ❖ Then, what we explain, our beloved, the question that we ask is how does the Word see?

How is the Father seen by means of the Word?

And what is it that the Word sees?

I do not have the audacity or carelessness to promise you that I explain that to myself or to you. I reckon your measure and know my limit...

²²⁴ 1 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of ST. John, tractate 19:3*

It was meant by that, that we do not understand that the Father does some works which the Son sees, and that the Son does other works after He sees what the Father does. Rather, both the Father and the Son do the same works.

So, if the Son does the same work as the Father, and if the Father does the work through the Son, it follows that the Father does not do something, and the Son does another thing; rather the works of the Father and the Son are the very same.

I shall give you an example which is not difficult for you to understand: when we write letters we write them first with our hearts then with our hands... the heart and the hand write the letters. Do you think that the heart writes letters and the hands write different letters? The same letters are executed by the heart mentally and the hand materially.

Notice how these things are done but not in the same manner. Therefore, it was not enough for the Lord to say, "whatever the Father does" but it was necessary to add "in like manner"...

If He does these things in like manner, then let them wake up; let the Jews be destroyed, and the Christians believe, let the heretic be convinced, because the Son is equal with the Father²²⁵. Saint Augustine.

- ❖ If you ask: then, what is the meaning of Christ saying, "the Son can do nothing of Himself"? I shall answer: this means that He cannot do anything opposed or strange to His Father. This statement proves His equality with His Father and His agreement with Him very much.

Christ's saying: "the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do" is like saying "it is inaccessible to me and impossible that I do a contrary thing." And His saying "for whatever He does, the Son also does" clarifies His complete likeness to His Father.

- ❖ What is the meaning of "the Son can do nothing of Himself"? He can do nothing of Himself opposed to the Father, not something different, not something strange. This shows the more, complete equality and agreement.

Why did He not say "He can do nothing opposite" instead of "He can do nothing"? So that He may prove there is no change, but accurate equality. This statement does not charge Him with weakness, but rather is witness to His great power... as the statement "it is impossible for God to make a mistake" does not charge Him with weakness, but testifies to His inexpressible power.

Thus the meaning here is that He can do nothing, that is to say, it is impossible that He does anything opposite to the Father²²⁶. Saint John Chrysostom.

- ❖ Neither the Son nor the Spirit has anything of Himself, because the Trinity does not speak about anything out of His Self... Let no one think that there is any difference in the work, in time or direction, between the Father and the

²²⁵ 1 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of ST. John, tractate 18:8*

²²⁶ 1 Hom 38. PG 59: 221-222

- Son; let him rather believe in the unity of the same action²²⁷.
- ❖ The freedom (of the Holy Trinity) is hidden, not in the existence of differences, but in the unity of the will²²⁸.
 - ❖ The Son was entitled to, and affirmed His equality with the Father, a true equality, regarding all difference in the Trinity as unlikely²²⁹. Saint Ambrose.
 - ❖ Christ made everything... not in the sense that the Father lacked the power to create His works, but that He rather wanted the Son to judge His works, so God gave Him the record of the created things. So the Son says, honoring His Father, "the Son can do nothing but what He sees the Father do, for whatever He does, the Son also does" (John 5:19) He also says "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." So, there is no contradiction in the work, for the Lord says in the Gospels, "And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine" (John 17:10)

We learn this with certainty in the two Testaments, the Old and the New. For He who said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26) certainly spoke to an hypostasis with Him. This is show in the words of the Psalmist: "he said and they were. He commanded and they were created." (Ps. 148:5) So it is as though the Father commanded and spoke, and the Son made everything as the Father commanded²³⁰. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem.

[Saint Augustine warns us against material interpretation]

- ❖ He did not say, "the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He hears the Father command." He said, "the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do." Look, do you understand that in this way: the Father does something; the Son listens to see what He also does, and that He does another thing similar to what the Father does.

What the Father makes, through whom does He make that? Unless it is through the Son. If not through the Word, you blaspheme against the Gospel" All things were made through Him." (John 1:3)

Therefore, what the Father makes, He makes through the Word. So, if He makes through the Word, He makes through the Son. Who, then, is that other who listens to make something He sees the Father make?²³¹

- ❖ The Father does not make things, and the Son makes other things. Everything that the Father makes, He makes through the Son. The Son raised Lazarus from the dead; did not the Father raise him? The Son gave sight to the blind, did not the Father grant him sight? The Father and the Son act in the Holy Spirit. This is the Trinity. The work of the Trinity is one; the greatness one, the eternity one, the works one. The Father did not create some people, the Son others, and the Holy Spirit some others. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit creates one same man... Saint Augustine.

²²⁷ 2 *Of the Holy Spirit Book 2:12:134m 136*

²²⁸ 3 *Of the Holy Spirit Book 1:17:112*

²²⁹ 4 *Of the Holy Spirit Book 2:8:69*

²³⁰ 1 *Lecture 11:23*

²³¹ 2 *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 76:9*

- ❖ Whoever attributes weakness to the Son, attributes it to the Father also. The shepherd carries the whole flock and not only this or that section of it... The Holy Bible promises abundance of grace, but we acknowledge its scarcity²³². Saint Jerome.
- ❖ Why is it written: "the Son does the same things" not "similar to those things" except that you may judge that the Son is one in the same works of the Father, not an imitation of what the Father works?

What is the meaning of "what He sees"?

Is the Son in need of physical eyes? No. For if the followers of Arius affirm that concerning the Son, the Father, then is in need of physical works so that the Son may see them to make them.

Then, what is meant by "the Son can do nothing of Himself"?... Is there anything impossible for the power and wisdom of God? Let these people understand that these are two attributes for the Son of God whose power is undoubtedly not a gift He obtains from another. But, as He is the life and does not rely on another to grant Him life, for He gives life to the others because He is the life; likewise He is the Word (1 Cor 1:24) not as an ignorant being asking for wisdom, but as making the others wise from His store. Similarly, He is the power, not as one who obtains it and in his weakness needs more power, but He rather grants power to the powerful²³³. Saint Ambrose.

**"For the Father loves the Son,
and shows Him all things that He Himself does;
and He will show Him greater works than these,
that you may marvel." [20]**

The two verbs "loves" and "shows" occur in the Greek language in the present continuous and signify love and sight as working continuously without interruption. This is love of the complete unity in the same substance. Therefore, "Aghabi" was not used, but rather "Filin" and seeing the continuous work which denotes the partnership in the same divine work.

**The works which are greater than healing the paralytic is raising the dead. [21]
And His resurrection and judgment of the world. [22]**

- ❖ This shows that all exists through one will, one authority and one strength... Since Christ does nothing of Himself, if Christ does everything like the Father... because He did not say that "everything that He sees the Father doing He does" but "He sees the Father do."²³⁴ Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ It is much greater that a dead person is given life, than that a sick person is cured. These are great deeds.

However, when does the Father show these deeds to the Son?

²³² 3 Letter 69:1

²³³ 1 Of the Christian Faith, 4:4:40-43

²³⁴ 1 Hom 38. PG 59:221-222

Does not the Son know them?

The Speaker Himself, does He not know how to raise the dead?

Did He need to learn how to raise the dead back to life, He through Whom all things were made? He who brought us to life when we were nonexistent, did He need to learn how we may be raised from the dead?

What, then, do His words mean?...

He says to us once what befits His glory, and another time what befits His meekness. He Himself the Most High deigned to come down so that He may lift us up high we who are low.

What then does He say: "and He will show Him greater work than these, that you may marvel." [20] What He shows to us is not for His sake. For as the Father shows Him is for our sake. He, therefore, says "that you may marvel."

Why does He not say: "the Father will show you" but says the Father will show the Son? That is because we also are members of the Son and what the members learn He learns in some way in His members.

How does He learn in us? As He suffers also in us.

Where do we prove that He suffers in us? From the voice coming from the sky: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4)²³⁵ Saint Augustine.

"For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them even so the Son gives life to whom He will" [21]

The Father raised the dead as He raised the Sarephath Zidon widow's son, at the time of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:22) and the son of the Shunammite (2 Kings 4:32-35) at the time of Elisha the prophet. The Son raises whom He will as what happened to Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:35-42), the Nain widow's son (Luke 7:11-15) and Lazarus in Bethany (John 11:14-44). He gives life as He will, not by asking for strength from outside as in the case of the prophets, and also His disciples. He has absolute authority over life! He has the keys of Hades and of Death (Rev 1:18). He has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens (Rev 3:7). He kills and makes alive (1 Samuel 2:6).

- ❖ The expression reveals an unchanging strength... equality in authority... "for whatever He (the Father) does, the Son also does", shows that He continues in doing everything that the Father does, whether you say raising the dead, forming bodies, forgiving sins or any other thing. He does in like manner as related to Who gave birth to Him²³⁶. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ This, absolutely, does not mean that the Son gives life to some, and the Father raises others. It means that the Father and the Son raise the same persons,

²³⁵ 2 ST. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 21:6-7*

²³⁶ 1 Hom 29 PG 59:223

- because the Father makes all things through the Son²³⁷. Saint Augustine.
- ❖ In this way the equality of the Son with the Father is simply affirmed through the unity in raising the dead. The Son gives life just like the Father. So that you may realize, here, His eternal life and authority²³⁸. Saint Ambrose.

**"For the Father judges no one,
but has committed all judgment to the Son." [22]**

This asserts that the judging Father does not act without the Son; nor does the judging Son act without the Father. They have one authority and they work together.

The Father judges no one, not because He has no authority, but because this is His pleasure that the Son who sacrificed Himself judges humanity. The Father created us through the Son, redeemed us through His death, and judges us through Him. Christ became the head of the Church through His work of salvation. He became above all (Eph. 1:11). He is the head of every man (1 Cor. 11:3); therefore, He completes that by the pleasure of His believers in participating in His glory. He was the One who began the battle against the kingdom of darkness, and He announces its total destruction in the Last Judgment. If the Son, in His humility became the Son of Man and suffered death on the cross, He also appears as Son of Man to embarrass and humiliate those who rejected Him and pierced Him with the spear of disbelief in Him.

As the Jews asked for His judgment and murder legally, He declared that He is the One who judges and will judge all humanity the Day of Judgment.

- ❖ We need, dearly beloved, great effort in every respect because we shall give account of, and will be asked precisely about, our words and deeds.

Our interest should not be in what happens now, but in what will happen then when we stand before the solemn trial. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10)

Let us mentally enact this judgment all the time, so that we may be able to persevere at all times in virtue... For He who forgives our trespasses now will judge us, He who dies for us will appear to judge all the human race as the apostle says, "To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." (Heb 9:28). Therefore, He says here "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father." [22-23]...

To understand "has committed" and "is born" listen to what was said elsewhere: "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself" [26] What then? Did He give birth to Him first and granted life to Him later?

Was He born without life? Even the devils will not imagine this because this is extreme stupidity and evil.

²³⁷ 2 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 62:4

²³⁸ 3 Of the Christian Faith, 4:10:129

Thus, just as granting life means giving birth to Him who is life, granting judgment is giving birth to Him who is judge.

And lest when you hear that the Father is His source, you conjecture that there is a difference in essence or a lack in honor, He said He will come and judge you, proving by that His equality with the Father. For, He who has the authority to punish and judge whom He will, has the same authority as the Father²³⁹. Saint John Chrysostom.

❖ "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son." [22]... When the Son judges, does the Father remain without work and does not judge?... This was said because in the Last Judgment, the Son only will appear to the human beings; the Father will disappear and announce the Son.

How will the Son be declared? In the form of His ascension because the form of Divinity is hidden with the Father, but the form of the Son is declared to the human beings.

How did they see Him go? In the body which they touched and held, and the wounds they ascertained when they touched. He appeared to them in this body for forty days, declaring His self in truth, not in illusion, in falseness, in a shadow or spirit, but in Himself. He did not deceive them: "Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." (Luke 24:39). This body became truly fit to inhabit heaven, not submitting to death, not changing with time²⁴⁰. Saint Augustine.

**"that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father
He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." [23]**

If the Son is honored just as the Father is honored, the Son has the same honor. All creatures, the heavenly and earthly, worship Him and devote themselves to Him, which is appropriate to God only, for He with the Father is the One God.

❖ Is the Son inferior because He said He was sent? I hear of sending, not of separation...

Between two human beings, the sender is greater than he who is sent. However, human affairs deceive men; on the other hand, the divine purify. Do not look at human affairs in which the sender appears to be greater than he who is sent... But in spite of that there are many cases when the greater is chosen to be sent by the one less than him.

The sun sends its rays but is not separated from the rays.

The lamp spreads light and is not separated from that light. I see transmission without separation...

A person who sends another person remains behind him, while the person who is sent precedes. Does the sender go with whom he sends? As for the Father who sent the Son, He is not separate from the Son... The Father who sends is not separate from the

²³⁹ 1 Homilies on St. John, 39:1

²⁴⁰ 2 ST. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 21:12

Son who is sent, because the Sender and the Sent is one²⁴¹. Saint Augustine.

- ❖ Do you not see how the honor of the Son is connected to the honor of the Father. Someone may say: What?! We see the same thing in the case of the apostles: Christ says "He who receives you receives Me." (Matt 10:40). In here He says this because He cares for His servants who are His. On the other hand, when He speaks about Himself and the Father, He says that because the essence is one, and the glory is one with the Father. He, therefore, did not say about the apostles, 'so that they honor them'; but here, He says, in truth, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father" [23]. When there are two kings, he who insults one of them, insults the other also, especially if one of the two kings is the son of the other. Likewise, he who huts his soldiers is considered having hurt the king but in a different manner²⁴². Saint John Chrysostom.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My words and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." [24]

His instructions, that is to say, the gospel of His salvation, are the seeds of eternal life which conquer death forever. When planted in the heart they raise the believer above eternal death and judgment on the Lord's Great Day. The believer will not enter the city of death where the spirits that deprived themselves from the source of life are imprisoned. The soul of the believer will cross to the empire of life where the believer will receive a new citizenship instead of the town of death. He will enjoy a heavenly residence to live there eternally in heavenly glory and speak a heavenly language.

Though eternal life has no relation to time, yet the deposit for this grant is offered in the present life, so that we may grow in it and enjoy its perfection in the future life.

- ❖ He did not say 'he who hears My word and believes in Me' (instead of believes in Him who sent Me) because in spite of the myriad miracles He performed over a long time, they still doubted Him. When He spoke later in this manner saying, "if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (John 8:51), they said to Him "Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.'" (John 8:52) Therefore, so that they may not get very angry, here, behold what He says? "he who hears My word, and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life" [24] This statement has a great effect on the acceptance of what He says, when they learn that when they believe whom they hear they believe the Father also. When they accept this easily they can accept the remainder of His discourse easily. His conversation in a humble way contributed to and introduced them to heavenly concerns. For, after He says, "has everlasting life" He adds: "And shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." [24]²⁴³
- ❖ In these two respects He caused His sayings to be easily accepted. First, because it is in the Father that we believe; then he who believes enjoys many

²⁴¹ 1 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 21:17*

²⁴² 2 *Homilies on St. John, 39:2*

²⁴³ 1 *Homilies on St. John, 39:2*

blessings. Not coming into judgment means no punishment, because he does not speak about death, but about eternal death and also about life without death²⁴⁴. Saint John Chrysostom.

- ❖ AS human beings love to live on this earth, they are promised life; and as they fear death very much, they are promised eternal life.

What do you love? That you live. You will obtain that.

What do you fear? That you die. You will have everlasting life...

Let us love eternal life, in that we understand how we need to strive very much for eternal life²⁴⁵. Saint Augustine.

- ❖ The authority of the Son does not increase, but our knowledge of that authority increases. What we learn does not add anything to His being, but rather adds to our benefit so that through our knowledge of the Son we obtain eternal life. Thus, our knowledge of the Son of God is not glory to Him, it is rather our benefit that is meant²⁴⁶. Saint Ambrose.
- ❖ In spite of its union with God, the soul does not enjoy full and absolute happiness; but the more it enjoys His beauty, its longing for Him increases.

The words of the Bridegroom are spirit and life (John 5:24) and whoever clings to the spirit becomes a spirit. Whoever clings to life passes from death into life, as the Lord said.

In this way, the virgin spirit yearns always to come nearer to the spring of spiritual life. The spring is the mouth of the Bridegroom from which issue the words of everlasting life. He fills the mouth that approaches Him like David the prophet who attracted a spirit through his mouth (Ps. 119:131).

As it is necessary for a person who drinks from the spring to put his mouth on the mouth of the spring, and as the Lord Himself is the spring as He says: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." (John 7:37), therefore, the thirsty souls wish to put their mouths on the mouth from which life springs and say: "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth" (Song 1:2)

He who grants life to all, and wants to save all, wishes that everyone enjoys a share of these kisses, because the kisses purify the souls from all uncleanness²⁴⁷. Saint Gregory of Nyssa.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live." [25]

Some people differentiate between the "word" of the Lord Christ [24] and His "voice" [25]. His word is the gospel of His salvation where the believer finds, through the

²⁴⁴ 2 Hom 39, PG 59: 222

²⁴⁵ 1 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 77:2

²⁴⁶ 2 Of the Christian Faith, 5:6:68-69

²⁴⁷ 3 "The Song of Songs by Saint Gregory, bishop of Nyssa; translated by Dr. George Nawar, 1993, Sermon 1

cross, the new life instead of death and enjoys freedom instead of slavery, for the Lord says, "My word is spirit and life." AS for His voice, it is in His word where the Bride delights in the voice of her Bridegroom and her heart is filled with the ecstasy of love. She feels His divine tenderness and accepts nothing instead: "My sheep hear My voice" (John 10:27)

The Holy Bible indicates three kinds of death: natural death, or that of the body, spiritual death, and eternal death. The first occurs when the spirit separates from the body; the second is when the spirit is separated from God, and the third happens when the spirit and the body together separate from God in the world to come. Accordingly, there are three kinds of life: natural life in this world where the body and the spirit work in unity together, spiritual life when the spirit enjoys union with God who guides her through the Holy Spirit, and everlasting life when the body shares with the spirit heavenly glory in the bosom of the Father.

With the coming of the Lord Christ the hour has come so that the spirit rises from its death or its separation from God the source of its life, and enjoys the new life here. This new life prepares the believer for the second coming of the Lord Christ when the dead will arise so that he bodies share with the spirits a glorious everlasting life. This is realized through the command of the Lord Christ when the dead hear His voice.

In His first coming, He speaks to the spirit and raises it from death. In His last coming, He orders and the dead rise. Would we hear always His voice that is directed personally to us "Lazarus, come forth!" In all our worship, or rather with every breath of life we must incline our ears to Him to hear His sweet life-giving voice.

- ❖ Resurrection is realized now and the people pass from death into life, from death without faith into life through faith, from death through falsehood into life through truth, from death because of evil into life in righteousness. Therefore, there is resurrection of the dead²⁴⁸.
- ❖ Those who believe and obey live. Before they believe and obey they lay dead. They walked and were dead. What do they profit by walking while dead? And yet, if one of them dies the death of the body, they run to prepare the grave; they shroud, carry and bury him; the dead bury the dead. It has been said about them: "let the dead bury their own dead." (Matt 8:22)

Such dead were raised by the Word of God so that they may live in faith. Those who were dead in disbelief were raised by the Word. Concerning this hour, the Lord says: "the hour is coming, and now is." With His word, He raises those: who were dead in disbelief. About them, the apostle says, "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." (Eph 5:14). This is the resurrection of the hearts. This is the resurrection of the inner man, the resurrection of the spirit.

However, this is not the only resurrection, because there is still the resurrection of the body also. Whoever arises again in the spirit arises also in the body to be blessed in the body. But, whoever does not arise first in the spirit will arise In the body for his damnation... When we look up to the Lord that He sealed on us with this resurrection of the spirits towards which we all must hurry and strive to live in and persevere to

²⁴⁸ 1 ST. Augustine: *On the Gospel of ST. John, tractate 19:8*

the end, there remains that He seals on us with the resurrection of the bodies also which will be at the end of the world. Let us now listen to how He sealed on us with that also.

He said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear" that is to say those who do not believe, "the voice of the Son of God" that is to say the gospel, "and those who hear" those who obey, "will live" [25] that is to say will be justified and will not again have no faith. When I say He said that as much as He sees us in need of learning about the resurrection of the body also, and we are left in that condition, He completes His saying: "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the son to have life in Himself." This denotes the resurrection of the spirits, granting life to the spirits. He then adds: "and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man." [27]²⁴⁹

- ❖ From which source will they live? From life. From which life? From Christ... He says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)

Do you want to walk? I am the way.

Do you wish not to be deceived? "I am the truth."

Do you want not to die? "I am the life."

This is what your Savior says to you... The people who died will arise; they will pass into life. When they hear the voice of the son of God, they will live. They will live in Him when they persevere in the faith in Him because the Son has life. He has life, so that those who believe in Him will live²⁵⁰. Saint Augustine.

- ❖ Did you learn here the sovereignty of Christ and His absolute inexpressible authority? Just as He will be in resurrection, He says, "Now." Therefore, when we hear His voice ordering us to arise, we rise as the apostle says: "when God commands, the dead rise" (see 1 Thes 4:16)²⁵¹ Saint John Chrysostom.

**"For as the Father has life in Himself,
so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself." [26]**

- ❖ "granted" because of His unity with Him. He granted not so that it may be taken from Him, but so that He may be glorified in the Son. He was granted not so that the Father may guard it, but so that it may be the possession of the Son²⁵².
- ❖ Do not think that it is a free gift for blessing, for it is the mystery of His birth. For there is no difference in life between the Father and the Son. How can you think that only the Father has immortality and not also the Son?²⁵³ Saint Ambrose.
- ❖ Look, you say and confess that the Father grants life to the Son so that He may

²⁴⁹ 2 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 77:7-8

²⁵⁰ 1 ST. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 22:8

²⁵¹ 2 Homilies on St. John, 39:2

²⁵² 3 Of the Christian Faith, 4:10:132

²⁵³ 4 Of the Holy Spirit Book 5:2:35

have life in Himself. As the Father has life in Himself, the Father has no need, and the Son also has no need. Just as the Father is life, so the Son is life. Both unite in one life and not two lives. Why is it said that the Father grants life to the Son? Not as though the Son was without life and obtained life. For if that was the case He would not have life in Himself²⁵⁴.

- ❖ What then "He has granted the Son to have life in Himself"? I say, briefly, He gave birth to the Son... As if He says "the Father who is life in Himself gave birth to the Son who is life in Himself." The word "granted" may be understood as meaning "gave birth"²⁵⁵.
- ❖ What is the meaning of "has life in Himself"? That He does not need life from another, He rather overflows with life and from Him the others - those who believe in Him obtain life... He was granted to have life in Himself: who was granted? His Word. Therefore, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God."²⁵⁶ Saint Augustine.
- ❖ Do you not see that this declares the perfect likeness except in one point, that the one is Father and the other Son? The word "granted" is simply to point out this distinction; all the rest is perfectly equal and alike. It is clear that the Son does everything with authority and power like the Father and that He does not derive power from another source, since He has life in Himself just as the Father has life in Himself²⁵⁷. Saint John Chrysostom.

"And has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man." [27]

Saint Ambrose sees that the Lord Christ accepted to obtain the authority to execute judgment "because He is the Son of Man." As the Son of God, He is the judge because He is one with the Father²⁵⁸.

Saint Augustine says, Christ is "the Son of God in Himself" [25] It was necessary (in His love) to become the Son of Man when He took us in Himself, or took our nature.

When He raises the dead, we see Him as the Son of God who gives life and resurrection. When He executes judgment His work of salvation without which we are not justified becomes clear to us. We see Him carrying our nature, becoming the Son of Man who died and rose and granted us His justification. The wicked also see Him the Son of Man whom they crucified, despised, and stabbed.

In saying "and has given Him to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man" He turns our attention to the prophecy of Daniel the prophet about Him: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14)

²⁵⁴ 1 St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 19:12

²⁵⁵ 2 St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 19:13

²⁵⁶ 3 St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 22:10

²⁵⁷ 4 Homilies on St. John, 39:3

²⁵⁸ 1 Of the Christian Faith, 63:78-79

- ❖ The judge, here, will be the Son of Man. This form will execute judgment, and He stood trial.

Listen and understand what the prophet says in fact: "and they shall look on Him whom they have pierced." (Zech 12:10; John 19:37). They will look on the very same form they pierced with a spear, sitting as just He who stood before judgment. He will condemn the real criminals, He who was falsely considered a criminal. He will come Himself in the same form.

This you will see also in the gospel when He went to heaven in front of His disciples, they stood and looked and the angelic voice said: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand... This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11)

Behold now on what basis was that to happen and in truth those who must be judged see the Judge. For those who are judged are the righteous and the wicked together. But "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt. 5:8). What remains is that in the Judgment the form of the bond-servant is declared to the good and the evil, and the form of God is kept for the good only²⁵⁹.

- ❖ What will the righteous obtain?... I have said that there, we shall be in good health, safe, alive without tribulation, hunger, or thirst, without wrong, or losing our sight. This is what I have said, but I did not say what a greater thing we shall have: we shall see God. This is so great that if compared with all the other benefits, they are considered nothing.

Will the wicked also see God about whom Isaiah said, "the wicked will be rejected and will not see the glory of God" (Is 56:10)? For this reason, He will declare Himself to all, to the good and the evil but will keep Himself for those who love Him... After the resurrection of the body, when the wicked are repelled and will not see the glory of God, He "when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (1 John 3:2) This is everlasting life²⁶⁰.

- ❖ Why then does the Father not come Himself? That is because He is invisible on Judgment Day. "They shall look on Him whom they have pierced": The form that appeared before the judge, will be the Judge. That form that was judged will judge. He was falsely judged, but will judge with justice. He will come in the form of a bond-servant and will reveal Himself in that form, for how will the form of God be seen by the righteous and the unjust? If Judgment was for the righteous only the form of God will appear to them. But since Judgment is for the righteous and the unjust, and since the unjust are not allowed to see God, so "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt 5:8)²⁶¹
- ❖ There, there will be separation (between the righteous and the evil) but not like now. Now we are separated not in place, but in characteristics, desires, faith, hope and love. Now we live together, we live with the evil, though the life of all is not one. In secret we are distinguished, we are separate like wheat on the

²⁵⁹ 1 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 77:10

²⁶⁰ 2 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 77:11-13

²⁶¹ 3 St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 19:16

threshing floor, not like wheat in the barn. In the field, wheat is separate and mixed, separate because it is different from straw, and mixed because it has not been sifted yet. After that, complete separation will happen... Those who have done good will live with the angels; those who have done evil will suffer with Satan and his soldiers...

After Judgment the form of the bond-servant will cross over... He will lead the body because He is the head and He will deliver the kingdom to God (1 Cor 15:24). Then the form of God will appear openly, that form that the wicked could not see, but only saw the form of the bond-servant.

He will reveal Himself as He promised those who love Him. For He says, "He who has My commandments and keeps them,, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." (John 14:21)²⁶². Saint Augustine.

"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice." [28]

When the Lord Christ rose from the dead, no voice was heard, because He rose by His own power and authority. However, at our resurrection on the Last Day, the voice of Christ will be heard, for He has the authority to raise the dead. Likewise, the sound of the angels' trumpets will be heard to announce the coming of the Omnipotent.

❖ All who hear will live; because all who obey will live...

We thus see the resurrection of the mind; would we do not abandon our faith in the resurrection of the body...

Indeed, all groups who are engaged in spreading any religious creed among the people allow the belief in the resurrection of the minds. Else, they will be told: if the self does not arise, why are you talking to me?... But there are many who deny the resurrection of the body and affirm that the resurrection has actually taken place through faith. Such are those whom the apostle resists saying, "Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some." (2 Tim 2:17:18). They say the resurrection took place actually in a manner that we do not expect another resurrection. They blame those who hope for the resurrection of the body as though the promised resurrection was realized through the act of faith, that is to say through the mind²⁶³. Saint Augustine.

"And come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. [29] I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; And My judgment is righteous, Because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." [30]

❖ As though Christ says here: 'You will not see in me a strange, different act or

²⁶² 1 ST. Augustine: *On the Gospel of ST. John, tractate 19:18*

²⁶³ 1 ST. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 19:14*

work that My Father does not desire.' Saint John Chrysostom.

5. John the Baptist Bears Witness to Christ

"If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true." [31]

If He bore witness of Himself without the witness of the Father through the prophets, and without performing divine, miraculous works, they would have had an excuse to consider His witness false. He rejected His witness of Himself because they considered that, a kind of asking for none from men. He does not want to bear witness according to their criteria which are false. In this way He did not give them a chance either to object to His witness or to doubt in His intention and think that He asks for temporary honor.

- ❖ When He says "My witness is not true" [31] He was rebuking them for their view about and objection to Him. And when He said "Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true" (John 8:14) He declared the essence of the same thing, which is that as He is God, they must trust Him even when He talks about Himself²⁶⁴. Saint John Chrysostom.

He presents Himself once as a human being, and another time in the glory of God... Once He says His witness is not true (John 5:31) and another time He says His witness is true (John 8:14)²⁶⁵ Saint Ambrose.

- ❖ He knew well that His witness of Himself was true, but for the sake of the weak and without understanding, the sun looks at the lamps. Because of the weakness of their insight they did not bear to see the radiance of the shining sun²⁶⁶.
- ❖ Did not the martyrs testify of Christ? Did they not testify of the truth? But if we look more carefully at that, we shall see that when the martyrs testified, He testified of Himself because He dwells in the martyrs and they witness of the truth. Let us listen to one of the martyrs, to the apostle Paul: "Do you accept the proof of Christ speaking in me?" (2 Cor 13:3 Valgate). Therefore, when John testifies, Christ who dwells in John testifies of Himself. Let Peter witness; let Paul or the other apostles witness, let Stephen witness, He who dwells in them all He witnesses of Himself²⁶⁷. Saint Augustine.
- ❖ If the Lord Himself who will come later to judge everything, did not want them to believe His witness of Himself and preferred to be justified by the witness of God the Father, how much more it is necessary for us His slaves not only to be justified by God's judgment and witness, but also to be glorified through His witness that we must keep²⁶⁸. Saint Cyrian.

"There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true." [32]

²⁶⁴ 2 Homilies on ST. John, 40

²⁶⁵ 1 On the Christian Faith, Book 5:10:123

²⁶⁶ 2 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 78:1

²⁶⁷ 3 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 78:3

²⁶⁸ 4 Letter 66 to Florentius:2

The verb "witnesses" here is in the present continuous because the witness of the Father of the Son is an eternal witness, a witness of love for Him who is one with Him of the same essence.

They believe in the Holy Bible which carries the witness of the Father through the many prophecies, and it is true testimony.

- ❖ As though He says: 'you may be saying to Me, we do not believe You, because it is said to the people whoever is quick to bear witness of himself is not qualified to be believed.'

So Christ's saying "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true" should not be read simply, but should be read by adding the suspicion of those Jews that Christ's statement is not true.

He mentioned in His conversation three witnesses: the first is the works that He did, the second His Father's witness, and the third is John the Baptist's announcement of Him. He mentioned the last witness first, that is the testimony of John the Baptist. For He says, "there is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true." [32] Saint John Chrysostom.

"You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth." [33]

Although the Lord Christ does not accept testimony from any man, yet, for their sake, He presents John the Baptist's witness of Him or "to the truth." As they respected him as the lamp that shines an hour - at that time John was in prison - the Lord Christ honors him because he is the lamp that announces Christ's coming in the midst of the darkness of this world.

On the one hand, the enemies themselves asked him and wanted to know his opinion; on the other hand, Saint John was known for disregard for temporary honor; and he did not ask glory for himself. He is faithful in his mission. Herod was not able to dissuade him from the truth. Besides, when John testified of the Lord Christ, he had not seen Him.

- ❖ He first said, "You have sent to John" and they would not send to him unless they considered him qualified to be believed. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ Look how it was necessary to say "For You O lord will light my lamp." At last, as he was enlightened, he gave his testimony... He is the lamp that was enlightened; enlightened so that it may give light. What is lit can also be extinguished. In order that he may not be extinguished, would he does not expose himself to the wind of pride²⁶⁹. Saint Augustine.

**"Yet I do not receive testimony from man,
but I say these things that you may be saved." [34]**

The Lord says He does not need the testimony of John because His works are enough proof and greater than the testimony of John.

²⁶⁹ 1 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 17:9

You believe that John is a prophet; that he does not tell lies, but tells the truth. He testified that I am the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29); if you believe in Me you will be saved from your sins.

- ❖ John's testimony was not the testimony of a man, because he said "I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" (John 1:33) From this point, it is clear that the testimony of John the Baptist was the testimony of God, because from God he knew it, and He said to him what He said. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation."...

Who is He who has more understanding than all His teachers?

I ask: Who is He who dares and sets Himself above all the prophets; Who did not only, through words, teach with great authority those with whom He lived, but has also taught the consecutive generations through the writings of the prophets?...

What is said here cannot be about the person of Solomon...

I know Him clearly He who understands more than all teachers, for when He was a boy, twelve years old, Jesus stayed in Jerusalem and His parents found Him after three days (Luke 2:42-46). The Son said: "as My Father taught Me, I speak these things."

It is very difficult for us to understand this about the person of the Word unless we realize that the Son is born of the Father..." He took the form of a bond-servant" (Phil 2:7) As He took that form, those older than Him in age thought that He should learn like a boy. However, He who was taught by the Father has more understanding than all His teachers, because He studied God's testimonies concerning Him and He understands them more than they do when He said these words: "You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Yet I do not receive testimony from man (John 5:33-34). Saint Augustine.

**"He was the burning and shining lamp,
and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light." [35]**

He means by the word "burning" that he was burning with zeal in his heart for the repentance and salvation of the people. "For a time" means a short time between his appearance to serve and his imprisonment.

"You rejoice" again means they persevere in joy, or are overjoyed for the news of the appearance of the Messiah who was expected to save them from the Romans. However, when He announced His spiritual kingdom, they rejected Him and rejected the lamp that announced Him.

When Herod was John's friend, the religious leadership spoke of John with all respect, or at least they did not resist him. But when he was put in prison, by Herod, he was

undoubtedly honored by the people, but the leadership did not care for him. AT the same time, the leaders were unable to attack him openly, because the multitude counted him as a prophet. Now, as the people realize that John is a prophet, and that he bears witness to Christ, they must accept Christ.

Saint Jerome sees the saints, like Saint John the Baptist, as lamps that shine and that their light denotes their joy and happiness for salvation. As he says, "In all the eastern churches, even where there are no relics of saints, when the Gospel is read, candles are lit even when at dawn the sky is red. This is not to dispel darkness, but as a testimony of our joy. Therefore, the virgins who are mentioned in the Gospel light their lamps always. The disciples are told to always gird up their loins and light their lamps. We read about John the Baptist "He was the burning and shining lamp." So, this sensible light indicates the light we read about in the Psalm: "Your word is a lamp to my feet, O Lord, and a light to my path." (Ps 119:105)²⁷⁰

- ❖ This lamp was prepared because of their confusion. Because of that it was said in the Psalms, a long time ago "I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed." (Ps 132:17) Wath is the lamp compared to the sun?²⁷¹ Saint Augustine.
- ❖ "For a time in his light:: This shows clearly their deflection and turning away quickly from John. Saint John Chrysostom.

6. The Testimony of Christ's Miracles and Works:

**"But I have a greater witness than John's;
for the works which the Father has given Me to finish -
the very works that I do -
bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me." [36]**

The Lord Christ talks often about His works bearing witness of His person and mission (John 10:25,32,37,38; 14:10,11). Here by "works" He does not only mean His numerous miracles and wonders and their diversity, but also His works of exceeding love, His conduction when He performs the miracles and His wonderful love for the human race. We often hear that "He was moved with compassion and healed them." Besides, there are His discourses and the unique events in His life, such as the voice of the Father heard at His baptism and transfiguration, and His victory over Satan during the temptation. He points out here the healing of the paralytic as a practical testimony so that they may accept Him and His teachings and be saved.

The word "given" here does not mean that the Son obtains what He did not have. It means executing the divine work of the Father and completing it. For example, salvation is the work of the Holy Trinity: the Father sends His Son to the world to offer Himself as a sacrifice, and the Holy Spirit prepares the womb of Saint Mary to achieve the divine incarnation. There is not separation, confusion, or overlapping in the work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit; it is one divine work. The Lord declared on the cross that He finished the work (John 19:30). As the apostle Paul says, "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb 2:10)

²⁷⁰ 1 *Against Vigilantius*, 8

²⁷¹ 2 *Sermon on N.T. Lessons*, 78:2

- ❖ The aim He cared for first was that they believe that He came from God. This is much less than that they believe He is God equal with the Father. Saint John Chrysostom.

7. The Father Testifies of Him:

"And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form." [37]

The Father Himself has testified of Him through the prophets as mentioned in the Old Testament and ended with the testimony of Saint John the Baptist. The Father also testified of Him with His voice coming from heaven on the day of His baptism (Matt 3:17) and when He was transfigured before three of His disciples.

- ❖ If you ask where did He testify of Him? I would answer: in the Jordan, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt 3:17)

I make clear that God has no voice or form; He is above all forms and melodies that have this quality. Saint John Chrysostom.

"You have neither heard His voice at any time, or seen His form." [37]

Saint Augustine discusses this verse saying: "Do not submit to the thought that you see God, a physical face; else with such thinking you adapt your physical eyes to seeing Him and you look for a face... Observe who is He to whom we sincerely say: 'My heart said to You, 'You face, Lord, I will seek' '... Search for Him with your hearts. The Holy Bible speaks about the face of God, His arms, hands, feet, chair, footstep... but do not think that what is meant here are human members. If you want to be God's temple you must break this false idol."²⁷²

- ❖ He is not like us perceiving one side and not the other. This is blasphemy not fit for the essence of God who knows the things before they are. He is holy, omnipotent, above all in goodness, greatness and wisdom.

We cannot give information concerning His beginning, form or appearance, for the Bible says, "You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form." As Moses said: "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord speak unto you."

Since it is absolutely impossible to see His form, how can you think of approaching His essence?! Saint Cyril of Jerusalem.

8. The Holy Bible Testifies of Him:

"But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe." [38]

²⁷² 1 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 3

Even though you believe in the Holy Bible and the prophecies in it, your hearts are not faithful to the word. You speak the word with your tongues, but your hearts reject it. For though the prophecies about My coming are realized, you do not accept Me. You possess the Books but reject your salvation. This is the opposite of David the prophet who says: "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You." (Ps 119:11)

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; these are they which testify of Me." [39]

As though He says to them: 'It is not enough for you to pride yourselves upon possessing the Scriptures, and that you read them. It is necessary that you search them diligently so that you may enjoy your redemption and eternal life, because all the Scriptures revolve round My coming to you.' Saint John Chrysostom observes that this statement refers to those who search for precious minerals in the depth of the earth; they dig mines and search with great interest for the precious minerals until they find them.

The Lord Christ mentioned these prophecies in His conversation with His two disciples on the road to Emmaus the day of His resurrection: "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (Luke 24:27)

The apostle Saint Peter directs us to this living testimony. He says: "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1: 19-21). He also says: "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." (1 Pet 1:10-11)

- ❖ Christ sent the Jews to the Scriptures not for ordinary reading, but to search carefully and intelligently; for He did not say 'read the Scriptures' but said "search the Scriptures." Therefore, He commands them to penetrate deeply in them because the words said concerning Him necessitate great attention so that they may be able to find the benefit in their depth. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ We say truly that the literal understanding of the Passover: the visible flesh is eaten, but what is hidden in the bones is left (Exodus 12:9). If anyone desires the marrow hidden in the text, let him search for it with Him who reveals the hidden mysteries to those who deserve them. Nevertheless, we must not give the impression that we shall leave the text without accurate examination. We shall not neglect God's commandment that urges us to search the Scriptures (John 5:39)²⁷³. Saint Gregory of Nyssa.

"But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." [40]

²⁷³ 1 The Song of Songs by Saint Gregory, bishop of Nyssa; translated by Dr. George Nawar, Sermon 6

They search the Holy Scriptures without faithfulness; they present studies and interpretations while ignoring the essence of the Scriptures: the person of the Messiah. For they do not want to meet Him and believe in Him so that they may have life.

"I do not receive honor from men." [41]

He did not ask them for that because He was in need of honor from them. For the salvation of man does not add anything to God; nor does the damnation of man harm God. Rather, the pleasure of God, the lover of mankind, is in man's stature and eternal glory.

"But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you." [42]

They resisted the Lord Christ under the pretence of jealousy for God, His glory and His Law and that they defend the divine right because Jesus broke the Law and blasphemed when He made Himself equal with the Father. Now He discloses their depths that they have no true love for God, nor zeal for His name, honor or Law. For, if they had that love, they would have known, in truth, who Jesus is; they would have understood His person and work. No other person could have dared to declare what the Lord declared: that the love of God is not in their hearts.

- ❖ One might say to Christ: Why do You say that? He answers: "I say that to rebuke them because they did not reject me for the love of God. God testifies of Me with His work and prophets. As somehow they had thought before that time that I was against God so they rejected Me. Now, since I showed them these miracles they should have come quickly to me if they loved God, but they do not love Him." Saint John Chrysostom.

"I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive." [43]

Saint Ambrose observes that along with the distinction between the Persons, there is unity in the divine name. Therefore, baptism occurs in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and not "in the names" (Matt 28:19). The Son came in the name of the Father (5:43). As the Holy Spirit is called the Paraclete (the Intercessor or Advocate), likewise the Son is called also (1 John 2:1). And, as the Lord Christ speaks about Himself saying, "I am the truth" (John 14:6), the Holy Spirit also is called "the truth" (1 John 5:6)²⁷⁴ Again the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are called "the light" (1 John 1:5; John 1:8-9; Isaiah 9:2; Ps 4:6)²⁷⁵ Similarly, the Three Persons are called "the life."²⁷⁶

The rabbis were very proud that whoever introduced himself as teacher, one person or more who had religious authority, testified of him. For this reason Saul of Tarsus had pride in the testimony of his teacher Gamaliel. Our Lord Jesus came and the Father testified of Him; He spoke in His name, and asked for His glory; but the antichrists will come in their own names (Matt 24:5)

²⁷⁴ 1 Of the Holy Spirit Book 1:13

²⁷⁵ 2 Of the Holy Spirit Book 1:14

²⁷⁶ 3 Of the Holy Spirit Book 1:15

- ❖ He clarified the necessity of the teaching concerning the unity of the divine name and that there is no difference, for Christ came in the unity of the name, but the Antichrist will come in his own name... He taught clearly in these words (Matt 28:19; John 14:26; Acts 4:12; John 5:43) that there is no difference in the divine name, in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit²⁷⁷. Saint Ambrose.
- ❖ The Jews did not accept the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Son of God, who is God; but they will receive the impostor who will call himself God²⁷⁸. Father John of Damascus.
- ❖ Who is he about whom He said will come in his own name? He mentions this in a mysterious way that he who will come is the Antichrist. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ It was said about the Antichrist and about all those who deny the Lord, these words: "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive." [43] Let us hear John also: "you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come" (1 John 2:18) What is in the Antichrist? We are terrified of him, except that his name is honored, and the name of the Lord is despised? What does he say except: "I justify myself"? We answer: "I have come to Christ not with my legs but with my heart. When I heard the Gospel there I believed. There I was baptized because when I believed in Christ I believed in God."²⁷⁹ Saint Augustine.

"How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?" [44]

The Lord Christ made it clear that their problem is in themselves. Their corruption blinded their eyes and they did not know the truth and receive Him. The main obstacle in the salvation of the Scribes and Pharisees is their pride. They prefer to lose their salvation and damn their spirits than that their reputation is violated among the people. They care for what the people say about them, not for what God testifies of them.

- ❖ He sowed them that they did not ask for God's right, but pretended to. They were on the side of their sickness and withdrew from the glory of God because they desired human honor more than honor from God. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ It is necessary that you care to avoid the nets of love of vain glory. Jesus says: "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another?" [44] What evil is that you sacrificed we cannot believe! Would we rather say: "You are my glory" (Jer 9:24) and also "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord." (1 Cor 1:31), "For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ." (Gal 1:10) "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."²⁸⁰ Saint Jerome.

²⁷⁷ 4 *Of the Holy Spirit Book 1:13:155-156*

²⁷⁸ 5 *Exposition of the Christian Faith, Book 4, Ch. 36*

²⁷⁹ 1 *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 79:6*

²⁸⁰ 1 *Letter 22:27*

**"Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father,
there is one who accuses you -
Moses, in whom you trust." [45]**

They accused Him of breaking the Sabbath and He proved to them that with His work He sanctified the Sabbath because He works according to the Father's pleasure. Now that the falseness of their accusation has been revealed, He does not in turn accuse them of breaking all the Law because He does not need to do that, nor did He come for this purpose. He was not incarnate to judge the people, but to save them. He leaves Moses himself in whom they trust, he himself will accuse and judge them.

**"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me;
for he wrote about Me." [46]**

The five Books of Moses are full of symbols and prophecies testifying of the Person the Lord Christ: His birth, service, crucifixion and resurrection as the Savior of the world. So, whoever believes Moses, believes the Lord Christ Himself because in Him were the prophecies realized.

"But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" [47]

If they do not open their hearts for the prophecies and understand the inner Law, but only hold to the letter in a dry manner, how will they be able to rejoice in the Person of the Lord Christ who is the sinew and center of the Scripture? They have the field but they do not search for the treasure hidden in it. Saint Paul says that a veil still lies on their heart when Moses is read (2 Cor 3:15) and they do not understand the aim of the divine word.

The discourse of the Lord Christ ends in complete silence on the part of the resistant group because they had no answer. It seems that all they did was that they acquitted Him silently. But their hearts were more hardened waiting for an opportunity to trap Him.

Inspired by St. John Chapter 5

I Have No Man!

- ❖ My spirit groans with the Bethesda sick man
I entered with him as through the five porches
I entered through the five books of Moses
I fell under the Law that exposed my weakness
I discovered I was sick, in need of a heavenly Physician!
- ❖ My life passed like 38 years, during which I lacked true love!
I have no man to put me into the water of divine love to get cured!
Who may grant me true love for my God and brethren?
Who will support me to perfect the law of love that I may be healed?
- ❖ You often passed, O Physician of the souls!
As though You left everybody to search for me

Because I am the first among sinners!
With love You continuously repeated:
Do you want to be made well?
Because of my stupidity I did not hear your voice!
I loved the noise of the world and was preoccupied with it.
I do not have two ears to hear the voice of heavenly love!
Your sweet voice, but because of my hard of hearing I did not listen to it!

- ❖ Your wonderful Holy Spirit attracted my heart to You.
I heard Your sweet voice,
And rejoiced in your face that is fairer than the sons of men!
I have confessed to You my need for who will heal me.

- ❖ At Your mighty word I rose from my bed
In obedience to Your command I took up my bed and walked home!
I took up the bed of my illness,
I see it and remember my weakness and death,
I remember Your authority, You who grant forgiveness and life.
I walk, and walk until I enter my house.
I shall not rest until I reach the bosom of Your Father, my eternal dwelling!

- ❖ You have turned for me my whole life into a continuous Sabbath,
My time changed into a feast and surpassing rest.
You took me across to the pledge of eternity
So that I rejoice in sharing in the divine nature.



Chapter 6

Christ, the Bread of Life

Or

The Heavenly Bread

In the first stage, John the Evangelist presents to us Christ as renovator; in the second stage He is the resuscitator. Now the evangelist presents to us the person of the Lord Christ as the Heavenly Bread that feeds the spirit and satisfies it so that it may remain alive and grow. He is the Incarnate Word; with His word He raises us to the new life and with His body, the Heavenly Bread, He enlivens us abide in Him.

In this chapter we see the Lord Christ feeding the multitude with two fish and five barley loaves offered by a lad.

First: Jesus lifted up His eyes and saw the hungry multitude. He did not wait for someone to ask for food or someone to feed the crowd; He looked out for the people's needs.

Secondly: As He gives food to the people, He accepts the offering of a small boy. Just as He gives, He takes; this is a sign of mutual love between God and humanity. He raised the morale of the boy who saw his small offering satisfying the hunger of the crowd and filling twelve baskets with leftover fragments.

Thirdly: God honors every person and asks for an offering from a small boy, a young man, or a child, no matter how small the offering may be! This is a sign of man's feeling of his vital role and his participation in the service of humanity.

Fourthly: The two fish symbolize the two Testaments, the Old and the New. The five loaves are symbolic of the five Books of Moses. What a difference between receiving the word from the Lord Christ's hand and reading it through human interpretation. The word of God satisfies and is abundant when Christ gives it to us through His church (His disciples).

Fifthly: He made the people sit down on the grass which symbolizes the body so that we do not let the body, but rather the mature spirit, be the guide. The body submits and works according to the guidance of the spirit and for the spirit, not for physical desires.

Sixthly: The multitude returned the next day to look for Him, not to rejoice in the Maker of miracles, but because they ate and were filled [26]. Therefore, the Lord Christ offered them a new and different food: His Flesh and Blood sacrificed as food that grants eternal life and resurrection.

He who walked on the water to carry us in Him so that we take His royal path offers

us Himself as bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world [33]. The Lord spoke clearly saying that He is the divine bread that invigorates us toward eternal life. Many of His followers stumbled and left Him. But He said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" [67] He insisted to offer His Flesh and Blood, not as symbols of something else; else those who left Him would not have gone away.

The Jews were not able to accept the divine word, nor did they enjoy His body and drink His blood; they, therefore, left Him and went away.

- 1 - Feeding the Multitude 1-14.
- 2 - Christ Walks on the Water 15-21.
- 3 - The People Seek Him in Capernaum 22-25.
- 4 - I Am the Living Bread 26-59.
- 5 - The Complaint of Some 60-65.
- 6 - To Whom Shall We Go? 66-71.

1 - Feeding the Multitude:

John the evangelist was accustomed to mention the miracles not mentioned by the other three evangelists, except for this miracle about which all the evangelists spoke. Everywhere in Matthew the Lord Christ is presented as king (The Gospel according to St. Matthew); as the servant of humanity (the Gospel according to St. Mark), as the friend of human beings (the Gospel according to St. Luke) or as the Son of God who grants sonship to humanity (the Gospel according to St. John). The Gospel wants to satisfy the needs of the people in every respect.

Moreover, the evangelist was careful to mention this miracle so that He may report the long discourse, related to it, about Christ's offer of Himself as the bread coming down from heaven so that we may be filled with Him who is the divine Word. He also offers His Body and Blood, a sacrifice for us for remission of sins and eternal life.

"After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias." [1]

The evangelist establishes the place, time and all surrounding circumstances of this miracle as a testimony for the truth of the story because of its importance in the life of the Church over the ages.

Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the lake of Tiberias and is called in a different place, Gennesaret. Here, it is called the Sea of Tiberias with reference to a town on the west of the lake which was recently expanded and adorned by Herod and which he called Tiberias after the name and in honor of emperor Tiberius. Herod may have made it his capital. The Lord did not cross the sea, but made His journey over the sea, that is to say, on its shores.

Saint Cyril the Great observes that the Lord Christ departed from Jerusalem and went over to the opposite shore of the lake of Tiberias to avoid the hatred of the unbelievers in Him. He did that willingly and not against His will. He teaches us to run away from the attacks of evil, not out of fear of death, but out of love for those who give us trouble.

- ❖ We do not strive for our own good, but for the good of others also. The work of love is not in resisting those who want our harm, nor in accepting what we endure, for this will arouse their bitter anger because of their failure in controlling what they hate. Love does not seek its own as Paul says (1 Cor. 13:5). This was obvious in Christ. Saint Cyril the Great.
- ❖ My beloved, would we did not compete with the violent, but rather learn that when they do so they do not harm our venture with their wicked counsels, but rather their violent work is repressed. When an arrow falls on a firm, strong resisting body, it returns with great force against whoever shot it and the violence of those who shot it does not find whom they opposed. Likewise, when we struggle against the disdainful, they intensify their cruelty, but if we bow and bend easily to earth, we stop their madness. Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Scribes and Pharisees heard that He baptized more disciples than John, He went to Galilee to put out their envy and, with His withdrawal, calm their anger which grew with the reports that reached them. When He went for the second time to Galilee, He did not go to the same place as before; He did not go to Cana, but went "over the sea"²⁸¹. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ As for Saint Cyril the Great, he thinks that the crossing to the other shore carries the symbol of the preaching of the Gospel of the Lord Christ crossing from the Jews over to the gentiles and it is impossible for the Jews to cross over because of their disbelief.
- ❖ The crossing of the sea which separates the two sides denotes the difficulty for the Jews to cross over, or rather the impossibility of their walking along the path that leads to it. For God declares that He "will hedge up thy way with thorns... that she shall not find her paths." (Hosea 2:6). What the thorns indicate here, the sea indicates there because it separates the reviled from those who relentlessly abused Him; and it separates the Holy from the defiled. Saint Cyril the Great.

**"Then a great multitude followed Him,
because they saw His signs which
He performed on those who were diseased." [2]**

Saint John does not mention these healing miracles because Matthew the evangelist refers to them in details (Matt. 12:10,22; 14:34-36). The multitude gathered around Him and wished to know Him because of the numerous signs He did. However, for the Lord Christ, the multitude meant no honor to Him, but showed the right of work to present the word of truth and to serve them so that they may rejoice in their communion with Him.

Saint John Chrysostom comments on this verse pointing out that what is said here does not reveal people who have great wisdom, for they were attracted more by the miracles than by the teaching although the signs are for the unbelievers and not for those who believe.

**"And Jesus went up on the mountain,
and there He sat with His disciples." [3]**

²⁸¹ 1 Homilies on St. John, Hom:42:1

The pulpit from which He spoke to the multitude was the mountain where He sat with His disciples. This mountain is the wilderness of Sidon in Philip's province that is in Galilee.

- ❖ He went up on the mountain to teach us always to rest from time to time far from the noise and confusion of public life because solitude is appropriate to study wisdom. Christ often went up above on the mountain and spent the night there praying, to teach us that whoever wishes to approach God must free himself of worry and look for a calm time without confusion²⁸². Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ Let us follow Him as He is persecuted and escapes from trouble caused by those who oppose Him, so that we also may "go up on the mountain and sit with Him." So that we may rise to a glorious blessing, more sublime than everything, and reign with Him. He Himself said, "you are those who have continued with Me in My trials... that in the regeneration when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you ... will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:28; Matt 19:28). Saint Cyril the Great.

"Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near." [4]

John the evangelist links this miracle with the Passover by saying, "Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near." [4] The true Passover is the offering of Christ's body as a sacrifice on the cross, and this is the very same Eucharist that we enjoy on the altar. This miracle was an introduction for the acceptance of the world of believers of the Flesh and Blood of the Lord sacrificed to give spiritual satisfaction and everlasting life that will not be conquered by time or death.

This happened before the third Passover that the Lord celebrated during His service. It was about ten or twelve days before the feast. The Jews were accustomed to spend a whole month before the Passover in the big preparations for it. They paved the roads, repaired the bridges if necessary, and they spoke about the Passover and how it was instituted.

The multitude in this region may have realized that the Passover was near and all men must go to Jerusalem. Consequently, Jesus Christ will certainly go to Jerusalem and they will have no chance to meet Him among the vast crowds coming from many nations. They, therefore, wanted to take the opportunity to gather around Him and, as much as possible, not to leave Him. They did not postpone their meeting with Him until after the feast, but were wise to take every opportunity to rejoice in Him.

- ❖ If you say: What was the aim of Christ to go, now, up on the mountain and sit there with His disciples? I would answer: because of the miracle that He intended to perform... and so that He may teach us to rest away from what worries us. The quiet and the wilderness agree with wisdom. Christ went up alone on the mountain many times and remained all night praying. Saint John Chrysostom.

²⁸² 1 Homilies on St. John, Hom. 42:2

**"Then Jesus lifted up His eyes,
and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him,
He said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?'" [5]**

Jesus lifted up His eyes and saw a great crowd of people from the popular poor class whose spirits are reflected in their eyes, precious spirits like those of the rich without discrimination. The Lord cares for their spiritual and physical needs and, therefore, asks Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" For it was Judas who had the money box, and Philip was responsible for the management of daily food for the disciples.

- ❖ This shows that He never sat inactive with His disciples. He spoke to them, made them listen to Him and directed them toward Him. This shows in particular, His compassionate care, His meekness and His condescension in His conduct with them. They sat with Him and may be looked at each other while He lifted up His eyes and saw the multitude coming toward Him²⁸³. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ Christ lifted up His eyes to announce that those who loved Him are worthy of the divine look, as it was said to Israel in the blessing: "The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace." (Numbers 6:26). Saint Cyril the Great.
- ❖ Jesus gave some barley bread lest they faint on the way, and He granted the sacrament of His body to the others (Matt 26:26) so that they may strive for the kingdom²⁸⁴. Saint Ambrose.

Saint John Chrysostom compares what God did with Moses the prophet and what the Lord Christ did with Philip. In the old time God asked Moses what he held in his hand and Moses informed Him he had a rod that has no power, but God caused it to be His rod with which He performed miracles. Here, the Lord Christ asks Philip about his and the disciples' potentials to feed the multitude. Philip had almost nothing: five barley loaves and two fish that a boy had, but the Lord used them to feed thousands and a load of fragments remained.

Because of His love for man, God wishes always to exchange a dialogue with him and ask him about his possibilities, so that God may, on His part, offer His divine capability that will act through our inability and weak possibilities.

2- Christ Walks on the Water

The disappearance of the Lord Christ when the multitudes wanted to make Him king, and His appearance, to the disciples alone, walking on the sea bears an important Biblical indication. The Lord Christ offers His Body, heavenly bread, not so that He may reign on earth, but that He may carry the members of His body (the Church) to the heavenly Canaan. He wanted to correct the wrong interpretations of the Messiah's kingdom. On the other hand, if Moses parted the sea so that the people may go across, the Lord Christ came walking on water to carry His people above the world currents.

²⁸³ 1 *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 42:2.*

²⁸⁴ 2. *Concerning Widows, 13:79*

The Holy Bible says about God, “He treads upon the waves of the sea.” (Job 9:8) The Judaic tradition of the Rabbins says that the Messiah will come from the sea. So the Lord wanted to affirm to them that He is the expected Messiah about whom the Bible prophesied and who is mentioned in the Tradition.

“Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.” [15]

The multitude wanted to take Him by force to make Him a king on earth according to their wish. However, He disappeared from among them and departed to the mountain alone. They did not understand the nature of Christ’s kingdom and they wanted to honor him in accordance to their thinking, not to divine thought. The multitude wanted to liberate themselves from Caesar and Roman occupation. But the Lord Christ did not want His disciples to be preoccupied with political business or bear enmity to any person.

By departing alone to the mountain He asserts to us the importance of our withdrawal from the world, from time to time, to meet God in secret talk and to enjoy holy silence. Our service of others, no matter how important it is, should not waste for us our personal secret worship.

❖ When they filled their stomachs, and food for them was what they mostly cared for, they decided to make Christ a king. However, He escaped... teaching us to despise worldly ranks, showing that He does not need earthly positions because the gifts coming to Him from heaven were radiant and great. Those gifts were the angels, the star, His Father proclaiming and the Holy Spirit testifying, and Prophets warning concerning Him a long time in the past. As for earthly gifts, these are all trivial. He came to teach us to look down upon things here and love future blessings. Saint John Chrysostom.

❖ He departed from those who wanted to give Him worthy honor. He refused a kingdom that was regarded as the greatest earthly reward, though for Him it was not, in fact, a thing He wished since He has dominion with the Father over all things.

It befits us to avoid the love of glory that is akin to arrogance and is not far from it.

We must also avoid the glow of honor in this present life because it is harmful. Let us search for holy humility. Let us give preference to one another, as the blessed Paul also gives advice saying, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:5-9)

If we care for heavenly concerns and live for affairs that are above more than for earthly matter, let us reject exaltation on earth if it is offered to us, since it is the

origin of all vain glory. Saint Cyril the Great.

Saint Cyril the Great observes that His going to the mountain by Himself alone when they wanted to make Him king, indicates His rejection on earth, but He ascends to heaven, the holy mountain (Ps. 24:3-4), so that when He returns from heaven in His second coming He reigns completely over us.

❖ When the Lord sat on the mountain with His disciples, He saw the multitude coming toward Him, so He went down from the mountain and gave them food at the foot of the mountain. For how could he depart again to the mountain, if He had not descended from the mountain before?

This bears this meaning: the Lord descended from on high to give food to the multitude and then ascend...

He came not to reign immediately, for He reigns in the sense for which we pray “Thy kingdom come.” He reigns always with the Father as He is the Son of God, the Word through whom all things were made. However, the prophets inform us concerning His kingdom in which He is the Christ who became man and caused the believers to be Christians...

His kingdom expands and is declared when the glory of His saints is declared after judgment is accomplished through Him. That is the judgment about which He spoke earlier that the Son of Man will achieve. That kingdom about which the apostle says “when He delivers the kingdom to God” (1 Cor. 15:24). Besides, He Himself refers to it saying “Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matt 25:34).

However, the disciples and the multitude that believed in Him thought that He came to reign at once. They, therefore, wanted to take Him by force to make Him king. They wanted to act before the time that He Himself concealed so that He may announce it at the right time.²⁸⁵ Saint Augustine

❖ What is meant by “escaped (departed)”? His sublimity cannot be comprehended. If we do not understand something we say about it, “it escaped me.” Therefore, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone, this firstborn from the dead rose to the heavens to make intercession for us (Col. 1:18; Rom 8:34).²⁸⁶ Saint Augustine.

“Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea.” [16]

It may be through the direction of the Lord Christ that the disciples took a boat to go toward Capernaum so that they may not be preoccupied with the useless dialogue about making Jesus king. He wanted to withdraw them from this test, but they face another test, which is the raging sea because of a great wind.

His walking on the sea came after He fed the multitude (Mark 6:34-51; Matt 14:13-33). Here, Christ after giving His life-giving word and His resurrection, He offers Himself at the time of famine as at the time of tempests announcing His divine

²⁸⁵ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:1-2.*

²⁸⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:4.*

presence “It is I” who grants help, who satisfies needs, “do not be afraid.”

❖ This boat denotes the Church, while He is in the highest... He truly said, “it was dark” because the Light had not come to them. It was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. When the end of the world approaches and dangers increase, horror intensifies, evil multiplies and denial of faith spreads, then in general, the light is extinguished. In brief the light that John the evangelist reveals wholly and clearly to be love as he says, “he who hates his brother is in darkness.” The darkness of enmity increases between brothers; it increases daily and Jesus has not yet come.²⁸⁷ Saint Augustine.

**“They got into the boat,
and went over the sea toward Capernaum.
And it was already dark,
And Jesus had not come to them.” [17]**

❖ If you ask, why did He leave them and did not appear to them? I shall answer: to make them have a greater effect. Saint John Chrysostom.

“Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing.” [18]

❖ The great waves toss those who are not with Jesus, those who are separated from Him or who seem absent from Him because they have departed from His holy law. Because of sin they were separated from Him who can save. If it is a burdensome matter for us to be in spiritual darkness. if we are troubled because we are overwhelmed by the sea of bitter voluptuousness, let us come to Jesus for He will save us from the dangers and from death in sin. Saint Cyril the Great.

**“So when they had rowed about three or four miles,
they saw Jesus walking on the sea
and drawing near the boat;
and they were afraid.” [19]**

25 or 30 stadia equal about 3.5 miles. The sea was about 6 miles in width. According to Josephus the historian²⁸⁸ the lake was about 40 stadia, that is about 5 miles wide. As for its length, it was about 140 stadia or 18 miles. But Pliny says it was 6 miles wide and 16 miles long²⁸⁹.

Saint Augustine observes that the number 25 refers to the law understood literally, whereas the number 30 denotes the law understood through the Gospel. He did not determine whether they reached 25 or 30 stadia. The number 5 indicates the law or the five Books of Moses to which it was referred in the five porches leading to the pool, and the five barley loaves which the lad carried. If someone tried to understand it according to the law (5x5) the result is 25. However, if he tries to understand it through the evangelistic perfection which is the number 6, the result would be 30. The evangelistic perfection is symbolized by the number 6 when creation was completed. When we understand the law according to the Gospel we see Jesus walking on the

²⁸⁷ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:5.*

²⁸⁸ *War, b.3, c.25.*

²⁸⁹ *Lib. 5, c.15.*

sea, drawing very close to us.

❖ For those, the law is complete and, therefore, Jesus comes. How does He come? Walking on the waves, controlling under His feet all the whirlpools of the world that submerge us, pressing down all heights. This is what happens: as time passes and generations succeed, tribulations increase; disasters and sorrow augment. All these rise to swallow us, but Jesus crosses over treading underfoot the waves²⁹⁰.

❖ He walked over the heights of the world, down, to be glorified by the humble²⁹¹. Saint Augustine.

❖ It seems to me that this miracle is other than the miracle mentioned in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew (Matt 14: 22-23).

If you ask: why were they afraid?! I shall answer: The reasons why they were afraid were many: concerning the time, it was dark; concerning the sea, a great wind was blowing; concerning the place, they were not near the land²⁹². Saint John Chrysostom.

**“But He said to them,
‘It is I. Do not be afraid.’” [20]**

He says: “It is I”; that is to say “I who dwells (among the people)” or “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex 3:14)

He came walking on the water, not to show His power over the sea and nature, but to declare the submission of the laws of nature for those who believe in Him, particularly in the middle of their suffering. He is the Lord who rides the clouds to save His people. He allows that His children have tribulations, but He does not leave them in the middle of their trial. He rather announces His presence to grant them rest and peace.

When they saw the Lord Christ walking on the water, they were afraid and terrified, because they thought He was a ghost. So fear of an illusion is stronger than fear of the trial itself.

❖ Contemplate how that Christ did not appear to those who were in the boat right when it sailed, nor when the dangers began, but when they were many miles away from the shore. So it is that the grace of Him who saves does not befall us right when danger begins around us, but when fear reaches its highest and the danger itself seems very violent and we find ourselves in the middle of the waves of affliction. It is then that Christ appears unexpectedly and expels our fear. He saves us from all danger, and with His inexpressible power, He dispels the fears with joy, calm and peace. Saint Cyril the Great

**“Then they willingly received Him into the boat,
and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.” [21]**

²⁹⁰ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:6.*

²⁹¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:7.*

²⁹² *Homilies on St. John, Hom 43:1.*

The more anguish comes near us, the LORD Christ comes nearer to save us. He draws near us but does not enter the boat of our life by force. He enters when we willingly receive Him.

Saint John Chrysostom thinks that Christ did not reveal Himself walking on the water because they were not ready for that because of their weakness. As for the disciples, they saw Him for a short time, then He disappeared because He did not enter the boat²⁹³.

At any rate, the LORD Christ appeared to the disciples when they were in the center of trouble. As for the multitude who were on land, they did not enjoy seeing Him so. Trouble is a fertile means for the spirit in order that it enjoys seeing its Savior drawing near it walking on the water of the world, trampling over the rough waves challenging the winds.

We do not hear, here, that the LORD Christ rebuked the waves of the sea, or the winds, to be still. However, as soon as they received Him into the boat, they found the boat safe on the shore. It seems the boat came ashore in an unusual way, miraculously. Acceptance of the LORD Christ in the spirit is enough to grant it inner peace in a supernatural manner.

❖ Christ is our deliverance from all danger. He achieves all deeds more than is expected by those who receive Him.

His disciples alone, and by themselves, as a model for the successive Church teachers across the ages, swim in the waves of the present life, as a model of the sea. They face many hard trials and, in preaching, endure dangers not to be overlooked, at the hands of those that oppose the faith and fight the spread of the Gospel. However, they will be free of fear and of all danger: They will rest from their labor and sorrow when Christ appears to them in His divine power after His death also when He has treaded underfoot the whole world.

This is what walking on the sea indicates, as long as the sea, in general in the holy books is considered a symbol of the world... Thus, when Christ will come in the glory of His Father, as it is written (Matt 16:27) then the boat of the saintly apostles, that is to say the Church, and those who sail in it, that is those who in faith and love rise above worldly business, will without delay or trouble, win the land where they were going, for their aim is to reach the heavenly kingdom, their calm harbor. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ O Christians, why are you afraid?

Christ speaks: "It is I; do not be afraid."

Why do you worry about those affairs? Why are you afraid?

He has already told you that those events will surely happen... "It is I; do not be afraid. Then they willingly received Him into the boat." [20-21]

When they recognized Him, they were happy and free of their fears, "and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going" [21]. An end at land was

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

found: from the water region to the solid region, from trouble to steadfastness, from the road to the destination²⁹⁴. Saint Augustine

❖ He permitted the tempest to rage so that they may seek Him. He appeased the storm so that they may know His authority, and He did not enter the boat so that the miracle may be greater!²⁹⁵ Saint John Chrysostom

3. The People seek Him in Capernaum

“On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone—[22]

Saint Cyril the Great says that the miracle of the LORD Christ walking on the water happened at night in darkness. The multitude who watched His movements discovered what happened without being informed by Him. “Whoever wants to follow Christ’s footsteps, and as much as is possible to humankind to be formed according to His model, must necessarily refuse to live the life of pride. He must not deviate seeking praise when he practices virtue. He must not boast when he enters an unusual life of great asceticism. He must rather yearn for God’s eyes only to see him, He who sees all that is hidden and reveals openly and clearly what is done in secret.”

**“However, other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the LORD had given thanks” [23]
“when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.[24]
And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, ‘Rabbi, when did You come here?’ [25]**

What does the other side of the sea mean? It is the north shore where Capernaum is in the land of Geennesaret.

It seems that they found Him in the synagogue [59] for it was the LORD’s custom to attend religious meetings (Luke 4:16). It befits us to seek Him in His people’s meeting place because He is in their midst. When they found that He had departed when they wanted to make Him king, they began to treat Him as a rabbi and not as a king.

❖ What did the multitude anticipate, except that He came there walking on the sea? It was not possible that He took another boat, for the evangelist says that there was one boat only, that which the disciples entered. Therefore, when they came to Him after great astonishment, they did not ask Him how He crossed the sea or how He arrived there. They did not want to understand such a great miracle. What did they say then? ‘Rabbi, when did You come here?’ [25]²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:7.*

²⁹⁵ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.43:1*

²⁹⁶ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.43:1.*

+ The Jews crossed the Red Sea directed by Moses, but in circumstances totally different from these. Moses did all that through prayer as a servant. As for Christ, He acted with absolute authority. There, when the winds from the south blew, the water divided to make them cross on dry land (Ex 14:21). But here, the miracle is greater because the sea kept its appropriate nature and its LORD walked on its surface. Thus testifying to what the Book says, “and treads upon the waves of the sea”(Job 9:8).²⁹⁷ Saint John Chrysostom

4. I Am the Living Bread

“Jesus answered them and said,
Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs,
But because you ate of the loaves and were filled.” [26] Many people do not seek God except to ask Him to stretch His hands and give them their temporary needs. Few people long for a meeting with God for Himself. Many ask of God the cheap bread, and not the precious love: the bread coming down from heaven (Ex 16:14; Neh 9:15; Ps 78: 24; Ps 105:40).

He stresses that He grants bread equal to the Father’s gift, not to Moses’ level [32]. He is God the gift, the bread that comes down from heaven. He feeds man, because He is divine wisdom (Prov. 9:1-5).

He grants bread, and is greater than Moses.

He is the bread that comes down from heaven.

He is the bread that gives satisfaction as He is the wisdom of God.

The Eucharist that grants eternal life.

❖ The lenient, gentle style is not always beneficial, for there are times when the teacher must employ a strong language... When the multitude came and found Jesus and flattered Him saying ‘Rabbi, when did You come here?’ [25] He, to show that He does not want glory from men, but rather demands one thing which is their salvation, answered them severely to correct their attitude, not only by using this manner of speech, but also by exposing and revealing their thoughts...²⁹⁸

❖ He rebuked them with His words, but He did that kindly and with compassion. For He did not say to them: ‘You gormandizers, slaves of your stomachs, I did for you so many miracles but you did not follow Me, nor were you amazed at my works.’ He rather spoke to them gently and amiably saying ‘You seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.’²⁹⁹ Saint John Chrysostom.

❖ We must obey and love Christ, not to obtain physical blessings but to receive salvation from Him. Saint Cyril the Great.

²⁹⁷ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 43:2.*

²⁹⁸ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 44:1.*

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

❖ Rarely is Jesus sought for His own sake only.³⁰⁰ Saint Augustine.

**“Do not labor for the food which perishes,
but for the food which endures to everlasting life,
which the Son of Man will give you,
because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” [27]**

The Father has set His seal on Him so that He may execute the work of conciliation and accept, in lieu of the believers, the Holy Spirit to descend on Him. The seal is set on Him, so that we all may be sealed in Him and that we may be counted God’s anointed.

❖ As though He says to them: I have fed your bodies so that you may ask for the other food that endures and feeds your spirits. But you hurried to take earthly food and, therefore, I will not guide you toward earthly food, but rather toward that food which does not give temporary life, but everlasting life: food to nourish your spirits, not your bodies.

❖ There is nothing neither worse nor more shameful than voracity. It demeans the intellect and renders the spirit corporeal. It causes blindness so that one does not see well³⁰¹.

❖ “God the Father has set His seal on Him” [27] meaning: “He sent Him for this purpose, to give you food.” The word announces other interpretations also, for he says in a different place, “He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true” (John 3:33)... It seems to me that this statement hints here at “the Father has set His seal” not that He “admitted” or “declared His testimony.” Christ indeed, admitted about Himself, but as He argues with the Jews He presents His Father’s testimony for Him³⁰². Saint John Chrysostom.

❖ Who can give the people food that keeps them to everlasting life? This is an entirely strange thing for human nature. This befits He who is God above all. As though He says ‘I am not incapable of giving you food that can endure and be fruitful toward eternal life and eternal joy. For, in spite of that I seem to be one of you, a man that has a body, yet I have been anointed and God the Father has sent His seal on Me to be like Him. Saint Cyril the Great.

❖ What is the seal but a particular sign? To set a seal means to set a mark on the thing in order that no confusion may happen between it and another thing.

So, ‘the Father has sent His seal on Him’... that is to say has granted Him a certain thing that in consequence, He may not be compared to other human beings. For this reason, it is said concerning Him: ‘God, Your God has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.’ (Ps. 45:7) What, then does ‘has His seal’ mean other than that He is excepted from the others?

This is the importance of ‘more than Your companions.’ He says: ‘Do not despise Me

³⁰⁰ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:10.*

³⁰¹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 45:1.*

³⁰² *Hom. 44.*

because I am the Son of Man. Rather ask of Me not food that perishes but the food which endures to everlasting life. For I am the Son of Man in a way by which I am not one of you. I am the Son of Man in a way by which the Father has set His seal on Me... He gave me something peculiar to Me so that no confusion may occur between Me and human beings, rather human beings are saved through Me.³⁰³ Saint Augustine.

**“Then they said to Him,
‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’” [28]**

When He asked them to labor not for the food that perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, they asked Him how they may accomplish divine works, or the works according to God’s pleasure. What is required of them more than to obey the Law? Is the Law incomplete and is there what is better than the Law?

Saint Augustine says that the Lord Christ instructed them not to ask for food which perishes, but for food which endures to everlasting life. Therefore, the multitude asked Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ [28] meaning ‘How can we practice this instruction?’ The answer came: to believe in Him whom He sent.

Belief makes their works acceptable to God. The LORD did not want to differentiate between the works and faith, but rather He declared that belief is itself work. This is faith working through love (Gal 5:6).

❖ Their question was not of good intent. We can suppose it did not originate in their wish for learning, but was rather the result of excessive pride, as though they refrained from more knowledge than that they already had. As though they say, ‘suffices us, good Lord, to know the writings of Moses. We know more than we need about the things that the skillful in the works of God should seek. What new thing will You give us in addition to those determined at that time? And what strange thing will You teach us that has not been revealed to us through divine words?’

The questioning here was by way of stupidity, not motivated by an active will. Saint Cyril the Great.

❖ They did not say that because they wanted to learn and work (as is shown in what followed that), but so that He may give them food once more³⁰⁴. Saint John Chrysostom.

**“Jesus answered and said to them,
This is the work of God,
That you believe in Him whom He sent.” [29]**

The answer was that they lacked one thing that was the essence of the Law: that they believe in Him, the Messiah that the Law mentions as the Savior of the world which sin corrupted.

³⁰³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:11.*

³⁰⁴ *Hom. 45. PG 59:262.*

The word 'believe' here has the meaning of practical, living faith: the believer clings to Him and follows Him in the path of the Cross.

❖ It was necessary that He shows them that they were still very far from worship acceptable to God and that they knew nothing about the truly good things. For, as they adhered to the letter of the Law, their minds were filled with symbols and abstract forms...

The work that the pure spirit practices is faith going toward Christ.

What is much more sublime than this is man's zeal to be wise in knowing Christ more than to adhere to the symbolic shadows. Saint Cyril the Great.

**“Therefore they said to Him,
‘What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?’” [30]**

The Jews demanded of the Lord a sign so that they may believe in Him. Did they consider feeding the multitude among whom were about 5000 men, with five barely loaves and two fish, a trivial sign?

They demanded of Him a miracle comparable to that that happened at the time of Moses when their fathers ate the manna in the desert; they ate bread coming down from heaven. They saw the miracle of feeding the multitude with five loaves and two fish and they did not believe. It was not possible that they see greater than this, but their minds were unable to comprehend the truth.

**“Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written,
‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” [31]
“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you,
Moses did not give you the bread from heaven,
But my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.’” [32]**

So that they may understand the truth, Christ revealed to them the depth of God's deed with their fathers when He supported them in the desert for 40 years with manna coming down from heaven:

- a) It was not Moses, but God who gave them the manna.
- b) The manna was not the true bread, but was a symbol for it.
- c) Now God gives them the true bread not to compare at all with the manna.
- d) He is the true bread from heaven, for whose sake their fathers were given the manna as a symbol for Him.

❖ With extreme stupidity they crown Moses with this work (the manna from heaven) and, therefore, they ask of Christ a sign equivalent to that sign, without showing any admiration, at all, of the sign He showed them during an entire day. Even though it was great, they say giving food must extend for them a long time. Consequently, we see Him rebuking them strongly so that they may admit and accept the fact that the power of the Savior and His teaching which they are about to receive, are the more glorious.

❖ Now also the Savior tells them they do not understand and they are extremely ignorant concerning the writings of Moses. For, they should have known quite clearly that Moses was serving God's works for the people and also, the works of the Israelites toward God. Moses himself did not perform the miracles, but was rather a servant and a worker in service of these deeds...Let us, then, learn with more discernment and prudence to respect our fathers the saints...However, when the speech is about our Savior, we must say: "For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD?" (Ps.89:6) Saint Cyril the Great

❖ He could have answered them: "I now perform greater miracles than Moses did since I do not need a stick or prayer, but I do everything by Myself. If you remember the manna, behold, for I give you bread." However, the time was not appropriate for such talk because the only thing He earnestly wanted was to give them spiritual food. Contemplate His infinite wisdom and the manner of His answer.³⁰⁵

❖ Christ's words to Jews: "Moses did not give you the bread from heaven", since the manna is not from heaven, so how may it be said that it is from heaven? It is an expression similar to "birds of the air" and "the LORD thundered from heaven."

His words: "the true bread from heaven" as Christ is the true bread, not that the miracle of the manna was false, but because it was an image and not the truth itself.

❖ Why did He not say: "It was not Moses who gave you, but I" but instead He put God in place of Moses, and Himself in place of the manna? He did so because of the extreme weakness of His hearers...Christ guided them gradually. Saint John Chrysostom

❖ Jesus promised them a greater thing than Moses gave them. True, through Moses was the promise of a kingdom, of a land that flows with milk and honey, the promise of temporary peace, of many children, good physical health and all the other temporary blessings which imply a spiritual symbol...It was the promise of filling the stomach on earth with food which perishes. As for the other, Jesus, He promises not food which perishes, but food which endures to everlasting life.³⁰⁶ Saint Augustine

"For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." [33]

❖ With extreme stupidity you suppose that the manna is the bread from heaven, although the manna fed the Jews only in the desert while the world extends to other innumerable nations. However, when the time of truth came close to our doors, "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven" for whom the gift of the manna was a shadow in old times. He says, "Let no one think that that manna was truly the bread from heaven, but rather was in the interest of that bread that can feed all the earth and give the world perfect life."

The true manna is Christ Himself understood as regarding God the Father gave Him

³⁰⁵ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 45:1.*

³⁰⁶ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:12.*

in the sign of the manna to those who were in ancient times.

“And given them of the bread of heaven. Men ate angels’ food” (Ps 78:24) ...It is obvious to all that there is no bread and food for the intellectual powers in heaven other than the only Son of God the Father. He, therefore, is the true manna and the bread from heaven whom God the Father gives to all the rational creations.

Christ promises to give us the food that is from heaven, that is to say, comfort through the Spirit, meaning the spiritual manna. With that manna we have strength to endure all hardship and resolution. When we obtain that, we do not fall, because of our weakness, in those matters to which we must not descend.

It was more appropriate for them to realize that Moses was only doing the service of mediation and that the gift was not made by a human hand, but was the work of divine grace. The spiritual is thus in a dense frame and is expressed to us as the bread from heaven that gives life to all the world, not only a food for one only race. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ He did not say it was for the Jews only, but for the entire world. This is not a simple food, but is rather the life: another life that is different. He called Him “life” because all were dead in sins.³⁰⁷ Saint John Chrysostom

**“Then they said to Him,
‘LORD, give us this bread always.’”[34]**

The Jews expected with the coming of the Messiah, to enjoy, along with authority, dominion, freedom and all kinds of temporary pleasures. Rabbi Mayemon said that when the Messiah comes He will raise the dead who will assemble in the Paradise of Eden. They will eat, drink and become full at all times. Their houses will be built with precious stones. Their beds will be soft silk. The rivers will overflow with wine and oil flavored with spices. The manna will descend on them having various tastes and every Israelite will find on his plate what pleases him. If he wants fat food, he will find it. A young man will taste it and find it is bread; to an old man it will be honey, and to a child it will be oil. Such will be Christ’s coming times. He will grant Israel peace and will sit in the Paradise of Eden...³⁰⁸

❖ While our Savior Christ in many words—if we may say so—tries to attract them away from corporeal concept, and with His perfectly wise teachings to make them soar in spiritual meditation, they do not go far from physical benefit. When they hear about the bread that gives life to the world, they imagine for themselves earthly bread because as it is written their “god is their belly” (Phil 3:19). And as they are conquered by the evils of the belly they deserve to hear the saying: their “glory is in their shame.” Saint Cyril the Great

**“And Jesus said to them:
‘I am the bread of life.
He who comes to Me shall never hunger,
And he who believes in Me shall never thirst.’” [35]**

³⁰⁷ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.45:1.*

³⁰⁸ *Cf. Adam Clarke Commentary.*

The LORD Christ, in His other discourses, used to present testimonies that He was declaring the truth. Sometimes, He announces that the Father testifies of Him. At other times He quotes the prophecies of prophets, or He gives His signs, works and miracles. However, here, as Saint John Chrysostom comments³⁰⁹, Christ does not mention witnesses as He declares about Himself that He is the bread from heaven, for they saw and felt how He fed them with a few loaves. The saint says that Christ declares His divinity, for whoever comes to Him will be filled and will never hunger.

+ He said to them “I am the bread of life” [35] to rebuke them, because when they thought that the food was ordinary, they rushed to Him, but not when they learned that it was of a spiritual kind.³¹⁰ Saint John Chrysostom

+ Now I have come to fulfill My promise in its time. “I am the bread of life”, not corporeal bread, for it does not just satisfy the feeling of hunger and free the body from destruction caused by hunger, but it forms the whole living being once more toward everlasting life. The human being thus created lives forever conquering death. These words refer to the life and blessing we obtain through His holy body. Through His holy body the special characteristic of the only Son, that is life, is transferred to us.

❖ When we are called to the kingdom of heaven through Christ—because this is, I think, what the entrance into the Promised Land refers to—the symbolic manna does not concern us any more. For, we are not nourished by Moses’ writings, but rather we have the bread of life, that is Christ. He feeds us to everlasting life by means of the provisions of the Holy Spirit, and partaking of His special body that pours in us communion with God and blots out death that overcame us since the ancient curse.

❖ I agree with you that the manna was given by means of Moses. However, those who ate at that time got hungry. I admit with you that water came out from a rock for you, but those who drank got thirsty. And that gift, about which we spoke, gave them merely temporary delight. But, “He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” What, then, does Christ promise? He does not promise a perishable thing, but rather promises that mystery—he Eulogia—in partaking of His Body and Blood. The whole human being then regains incorruption and does not need anything that drives away death, I mean food and drink. Christ’s holy body gives life to them who have the Body in them and preserves them totally in incorruption because His body blends with their bodies. For we realize no other body but His has life in essence. His Body has no equivalent body.

❖ When we approach that divine, heavenly blessing and ascend to the holy communion with Christ, by that only do we vanquish Satan’s deception and as we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) we rise to life and incorruption.
Saint Cyril the Great

❖ You demand bread from heaven. This bread is before you and you do not want to eat. “But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe.”[36]³¹¹ Saint

³⁰⁹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 45:2.*

³¹⁰ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.45:l.*

³¹¹ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:14.*

Augustine

“But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe.” [36]

+ They saw the LORD, God in essence, when He fed the great innumerable crowd. They had come to Him with five barley loaves and two small fish that He broke and distributed to them. They saw but did not believe because of the blindness that covered their understanding like fog because of the divine wrath... As they adhere to innumerable stumbling blocks and are bound by cords of their iniquities from which there is no escape (Prov 5:22) they did not accept Him when He came to them He who is able to untie their fetters and liberate them. For this reason, these people were hard-hearted. Saint Cyril the Great

**“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me,
and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” [37]**

Saint John Chrysostom directs our attention here to the role of God and the role of man. Man cannot believe by Himself, but by God attracting him to Himself and by God’s free active grace in man. But the human being does not enjoy this faith by force, but rather comes to the LORD, in all freedom, and He keeps and sanctifies him and does not cast him out.

❖ He denotes, here, the gentile people who are about to believe in Him wholeheartedly. I shall not cast out the person who comes to Me: that is to say, I shall not throw him like a useless vessel...as a despised person and he will not remain without a share of My care. I shall gather him into My barn and he will dwell in the heavenly places. He will see himself having all hope surpassing man’s understanding. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ What He declares, here, is nothing but this: “Belief in Me is not an ordinary thing. It does not come by means of human evidence or proofs. It rather needs a proclamation from above and a spirit whose disposition is good. God attracts that spirit so that it may accept the proclamation.”³¹² Saint John Chrysostom

**“For I have come down from heaven,
not to do My own will,
but the will of Him who sent Me.” [38]**

He came down from heaven, not to do what human beings wish, but to act in accordance to His divine unlimited wisdom, according to His goodness and mercy. The Jewish tendency is to despise the tax collectors and sinners and shut the door of heaven in the face of gentiles; but God’s mercies embrace them. The Word, the Son, came to declare these divine mercies.

❖ “I have come down from heaven” that is to say, I became man in accordance to the good pleasure of God the Father. I have refused to do deeds incongruous with God’s will so that I may fulfill for them—those who believe in Me—everlasting life and resurrection from the dead by destroying the power of death. He endured the contempt

³¹² *Homilies on St. John, Hom.45:2.*

of the Jews, their insults, offense, mockery, scourge, spitting and what is worse, false witness, and lastly death.

You will understand why Christ our Savior did not desire the suffering on the cross, and yet wanted it for our sake and for the good pleasure of God the Father. For, when He was about to go to suffer, He addressed God (the Father) saying, in the form of a prayer “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matt 26:39). As He is God the Word, the immortal, incorruptible and life itself in essence, He could not be afraid in front of death. And I believe this is obvious to all, for as He should be alarmed before death when He is on its verge, He is shown truly as a man...The union of humanity with the Word brought back the assurance appropriate to God and was recalled to an honorable aim. I mean to say that human nature did not do what seemed to be good for its own will, but rather followed the divine aim, being immediately prepared to run toward whatever its Creator’s law demands of it to do.

Do you now see how Christ did not want death because of the body and the mortification of suffering, and yet He wanted death so that He may accomplish the purpose of the good pleasure of the Father for the sake of the whole world, that is life and redemption for all! Saint Cyril the Great

**“This is the will of the Father who sent Me,
that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing,
but should raise it up at the last day.” [39]**

God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. But He does not force them to be saved as though they were pieces of rock. He treats them like rational beings having complete freedom.

❖ What do you say? Is Your will different from His will? In order that no one may think that, we read what follows. What He said was this: “I came not to do anything but what the Father wills. For, I have no will of My own that is different from that of the Father. Everything that is for the Father is for Me; and everything that is for Me is for the Father. Everything that is for the Father and for the Son is shared. So, He says truly, “not to do My own will”...because as I said at a different place, He concealed higher concerns for a while. He desired to prove that if He said, “this is My won will” they would have despised Him. Therefore, He says, “As I cooperate with that will” desiring to avert them the more. As though He says, “What do you think? Do you vex Me with your disbelief? No, for you anger My Father” and “This is the will of who sent Me that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing”[39]. Here, He appears He does not need their service, since He did not come for personal benefit, but for their salvation, not to obtain honor from them...What came before and after that is that He strives with all zeal to show that He came for the sake of their salvation. And He says that He brings glory to the Father, so that they may not distrust Him.³¹³ Saint John Chrysostom

**“And this is the will of Him who sent Me,
that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him**

³¹³ Hom. 45. PG 59:267.

**may have everlasting life;
and I will raise him up at the last day.” [40]**

❖ Our redemption and deliverance from death, and our restoration to life is the work of the entire Holy Trinity...Through all the Holy Trinity come all good things to us, so that God the Father is all in all through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ Who believes in Him eats the living bread.³¹⁴ Saint Augustine

❖ Why does He always stress resurrection? So that the people may not judge God's care through the present circumstances alone, like those who despair because they do not enjoy munificence here. They should rather wait for the future affairs. Also they must not think anything of God because they are not punished for their sins. They should rather look out for the coming life. Now, those people do not gain anything (from their iniquity), but we must win profit through suffering by a continuous remembrance of the resurrection...There is resurrection and it is near and not far or at some distance from us. “For, yet a little while He who is coming will come and will not tarry.” (Heb.10:37)³¹⁵ Saint John Chrysostom

**“The Jews then complained about Him,
because He said, ‘I am the bread which came down from heaven.’”[41]**

The Jews complained about Him because in His talk He asserted to them that He is infinitely greater than Moses, that He alone can give them everlasting life, and that He came down from heaven. They heard about angels coming down from heaven, but they never heard that a man was of heavenly essence.

❖ He Himself is “the bread which came down from heaven”, the bread that quickens the deficient and does not diminish. Bread that can be eaten (and tasted) and cannot be wasted. This bread is denoted by the manna. For it has been said, He gave “them of the bread of heaven. Men ate angels’ food” (Ps 78:24-25).

Who is the angels’ food but Christ?

However, so that man may eat angels’ food, the LORD of angels became man. If He had not become man, He would not have had a body; and if He had no body, we would not eat the altar bread.

Let us hurry to the inheritance, looking out for our acceptance of a great pledge from Him.

Brethren, would we yearned for Christ's life, looking out for holding the pledge of Christ's death. Saint Augustine

❖ “Whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame.” (Phil 3:19) This is what Paul said about some people in his epistle to the Philippians. Now it is clear that those Jews were of this kind. This is obvious in what happened before and in what

³¹⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 26:1.*

³¹⁵ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.45:2.*

they said when they came to Christ. When He gave them bread and filled their stomachs, they said He is a prophet and wanted to make Him a king. However, when He preached to them about the spiritual bread and everlasting life, when He led them away from the palpable and spoke about the resurrection and raised their minds to what is above, it befitted them to admire that, but instead they complained and went away.³¹⁶ Saint John Chrysostom

“And they said, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” [42]

❖ It was more appropriate for them to realize that Christ who is expected to come would not be without a physical body, but would rather come in a human form as was prophesied about Him. He is in the appearance shared by all. For this reason, the voice of the prophet tells us that the holy virgin “shall conceive, and bear a son” (Isaiah 7:14) ...and “the LORD has sworn in truth to David” (Ps 132:11). He will not turn from what He promised that “I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body” as it was written. It was prophesied also that “there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse” (Isaiah 11:1)...However, as the Jews comprehend the physical measure of Christ our Savior, and as they know His mother and His father (though Joseph was not really His father) they were not ashamed to complain because Christ said that “He came down from heaven.” Saint Cyril the Great

❖ The Jews said about Christ “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph?” It is clear that they still did not know His miraculous, wonderful birth. They, therefore, called Him the son of Joseph. They did not say this because He was the son of Joseph, but they said this because they could not hear about His wonderful birth. Saint John Chrysostom

❖ Those Jews were far from the bread that is from heaven, and they did not know how to hunger for it...

Their heartstrings were weak; they had open ears but were deaf; they saw but stood blind. This bread in truth requires hunger in the inner man. For this reason He says at a different place, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Matt 5:6). The apostle Paul says that Christ is for us righteousness (1 Cor 1:30). Therefore, he who hungers for this bread, hungers for righteousness, that righteousness who came down from heaven, righteousness that God grants, not that which man does for himself...

What is the righteousness of God for man? It is that man becomes righteous in God.

However, once more, what was the righteousness of those Jews? That was the righteousness they made with their strength and upon which they relied. By this they declared they observed the law by their uprightness, although no one perfects the law without the help of grace, that is to say, the help of the bread that came down from heaven.³¹⁷ Saint Augustine

³¹⁶ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.46:1.*

³¹⁷ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 26:1.*

**“Jesus therefore answered and said to them,
‘Do not murmur among yourselves.’” [43]**

In spite of the prophecies which affirm that the Messiah will come of David’s descendants, and that He is born of a virgin, the Jews criticize Christ looking on Him with contempt as the son of Mary and Joseph who are perfectly known to them. On the other hand, He gently draws their attention to His heavenly Father who alone can reveal to them the Son Incarnate who grants the resurrection.

❖ The Jews looked at Jesus and did not know that His Father is in heaven. They did not confess that He in essence is the Son of the God of all. They only perceived His earthly mother, and Joseph. As He answers them gently, He quickly works by turning them to His divine honor for their benefit. It is as if He knows their secret murmur and what goes on in their minds. Through this same matter He moves them to realize that they fell away from the truth and formed an extremely base idea about Him. It befitted them to offer divine honor to Him who knows their hearts perfectly and tests the movement of thought. He does not lack knowledge of the thoughts that go on in their minds...He reveals to them that His knowledge is of the work of exalted grace...

For their good He asserts to them the promise that He will raise from the dead those who believe in Him. Thus, He proves even to the most ignorant people, that He is God truly and in essence because the ability to raise from the dead is that of God alone and does not pertain to any creature. Saint Cyril the Great

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”[44]

How does the Father draw him? Saint Augustine answers that what draws a person is what he enjoys.

If you offer grass, the flock will be drawn to it, and if you offer fruit a child will be drawn. Thus the Father draws a human being by offering him the Savior as being his desire. The human being that realizes in himself that he is a lost sinner, and yearns to fly from hell and reach heaven, finds in Christ’s blood what attracts him.

As though He says to them “Why do you murmur among yourselves? You cannot believe unless the Father draws you.” He draws the spirits not with partiality, but he who asks enjoys faith; yet He draws no one against his will.

Saint Augustine says “It is possible that a person comes to church against his will. He can approach the altar against his will and partake of the Sacrament by force, but he cannot believe unless he wants to. Faith is not something that is achieved through the body. Listen to the apostle ‘with the heart one believes unto righteousness.’ What follows is this...’and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation’ (Rom 10:10). This confession is issued from the bottom of the heart. Sometimes you hear a person confessing, and you do not know whether he believes or not.

Therefore, since a man believes in Christ with the heart, and what he does he does not do unwillingly, nor is he drawn against his will, so how may we answer the question ‘No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him’ [44]?

Someone may say ‘If he is drawn, he goes against his will. And if he goes unwillingly, he believes...For we do not go to Christ with our feet, but with faith, not with physical emotion, but against our will...’

Do not think that you are drawn against your will, for the mind also is drawn with love.

It is necessary for us also that we do not fear, lest we are reproached in accordance to this evangelical word of the holy Bible by those who are oppressive with words while they are far from active work and from spiritual concerns, lest we are told ‘how can I believe willingly if I am not drawn?’ I say, it is not enough that you are drawn willingly, for you can be drawn even joyfully. “Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” (Ps 37:4). There is delight for the heart that finds sweetness in that bread from heaven. In addition to this, if what the poetic line says is true ‘Every man is drawn by his desire’, it follows that not through necessity, but through delight, not as an obligation but as a joy, a man is drawn. How much more we must say that a human being is drawn to Christ when he delights in the truth, when he rejoices in the blessing, in righteousness and in everlasting life, all of which is Christ?³¹⁸

**“It is written in the prophets,
‘And they shall all be taught by God.’
Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.”
[45]**

This occurs in Jeremiah 31:34 and Isaiah 54:13. How does God teach us? By declaring His practical love for us through His Son’s cross. Before, they were in terror of God as the judge, but after His declaration of His love for them through the cross, He taught them and drew them to Him so that they may enjoy the everlasting life.

Saint Cyril the Great comments on the statement of the LORD Christ that all will be taught by God, saying “As God is the Father, and this is how He is comprehended and how it is preached about Him, He, through this, sows the knowledge of His Son Himself in His hearers. It is thus said of the Son also, that He is of Him truly in essence and so proclaims the Father. Consequently, He says ‘I have manifested Your name to the men’ (John 17:6) ...The Father plants in us the perception of His Son proper, not with a voice that comes from above the clouds, or encircles the earth like thunder, but by divine enlightenment shining in us that we may understand the revelation of the holy Bible.

❖ Do you not see the honor of faith and that it is not of a human being, nor by a human being that they are taught this, but by God Himself?³¹⁹ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ It is written in the prophets “And they shall all be taught by God” [45] Why, O Jews, do I say this? The Father does not teach you, so how can you know Me? For, God shall teach all men of that kingdom. They will not be taught by human beings. And if they are taught through people, what they understand is an inner gift for them

³¹⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 26:2-4.*

³¹⁹ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.46:1.*

that shines in them and is announced in them.

What is the role of men who preach the news from without? What I do until now is from without. I pour the sound of words into your ears. What is the value of what I say or speak about unless it is revealed for you from within?

Outside, there is the man who plants the tree; inside, there is the Creator of the tree. He who plants and he who waters work without. This is what we do. However, “neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1 Cor 3:7). That means that all those are taught by God. Who are all those? “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” [45]. Look how the Father attracts. He gives joy through His teaching. He does not use compulsion. How does He attract? “They shall all be taught by God” [45]. This is the Father’s attraction.³²⁰

+ We know how God teaches those who are God’s meek ones. For those who hear from the Father and learn, come to Him who justifies the ungodly (John 6:45; Rom 4:5) in order that they may keep God’s justification not only in their memory, but also in carrying out righteousness. Thus, he who glories, glories not in himself but let him glory in the LORD (1 Cor 1:31) and overflow with gratitude. Saint Augustine

“Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father.” [46]

He does not teach them by letting them see Him face to face, or through a direct vocal conversation, but rather, His Holy Spirit works in them. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him (John 1:18).

Saint Cyril the Great observes that here, the LORD Christ means, in an implicit way, Moses the great among the prophets. Some Jews thought that when Moses entered into the thick darkness, he saw with his physical eyes, God who cannot be seen. Here, the LORD Christ affirms that He alone sees the Father because He is born of Him. “However, how and by what means He sees the Father or the Father sees Him, our tongue is incapable of mentioning that thought, but we must understand it in a divine manner.”

❖ Someone may object saying, what then, is it not written that ‘the angels of these little ones always see the face of My Father who is in heaven’ (see Matt 18:10)? Yes, but the angels see God not as He is, but according to their endurance. So, Jesus Christ says, “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God, He has seen the Father.” The angels see God according to their power of enduring and the archangels see Him as much as they can endure, the thrones and authorities see more than the former., but do not see as God is worthy.³²¹

³²⁰ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 26:7.*

³²¹ In his article about ‘Divine Care’ translated by Aida Hanna, chapter 3 Saint John Chrysostom discusses the limitations of the wisdom of the heavenly beings in knowing God as He is or His judgments perfectly. He says, “Truly, God even in relation to these ranks is not comprehended and they cannot approach Him. He, therefore, condescends in the manner related in Revelation. For, God is not restricted by place and does not sit on a throne... Rather, His sitting on a throne and being surrounded by heavenly hosts is by way of His love for them.”

The Son with the Holy Spirit alone can see the Father as He really is because He “searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10). Thus the only begotten Son with the Holy Spirit comprehend the Father in His perfection, for it is said, “Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt 11:27).

As He sees all according to the power of enduring, He, therefore, sees the Father in His perfection and reveals God the Father through the Spirit, since the Son with the Spirit are “One” with the Father in divinity.

The begotten knows the begetter, and the begetter knows the begotten.

If the angels are ignorant in ‘knowing God in His perfection’, let no one be ashamed of confessing his ignorance. Truly, I speak now as anyone speaks at any occasion. But how do I speak, I do not know. So, how can I inform you concerning Him who grants the gift of speaking!

And as I cannot acquaint you with the distinctive qualities of the spirit, how can I describe the Giver of the spirit?!³²²

❖ We believe in One God: the Immeasurable, Inexpressible Father whom “no one has seen” but “the only begotten Son...has declared Him” (John 1:18). For, “He who is from God, He has seen the Father” (1 Tim 6:16) He whom the angels always see (Matt 18:10) according to the degree of each. As for the brilliance of the Father’s face “in perfection”, this will remain in sanctity for the Son with the Holy Spirit.³²³ Saint Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ He Himself has clarified this and declared to us the meaning He intends as He says, “Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” He immediately adds what enables us to understand: “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father” [46].

What does He say? I see the Father; you do not see Him; in spite of that you do not come to me, except the Father draws you. And does being drawn by the Father mean other than that you learn from the Father? What do you learn from the Father except what you hear about Him? What do you hear about Him, except you hear the Word of the Father, that is to say you hear Me? In this case when I say “everyone who has heard and learned from the Father” you must say to yourselves: but we have never seen the Father, how can we hear Him? Hear from Me. For, “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father.” I know the Father. I am from the Father. Hear from Me as the Word that is from Him, not the vocal, articulate word, but the Word that remains with the Speaker and draws the hearer.³²⁴ Saint Augustine

**“Most assuredly, I say to you,
he who believes in Me has everlasting life.” [47]**

³²² Article 6:6.

³²³ Article 7:11.

³²⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 26:9.*

The LORD Christ declares in this that he who believes in Him:

- 1- The Father draws him through His Son's attracting works of redemption.
- 2- Hears His teachings.
- 3- Accepts the salvation offered to him.
- 4- Is nourished by the Heavenly Bread.
- 5- Is preserved in the Faith.
- 6- Does not perish but is raised in the Last Day.
- 7- Enjoys everlasting life.

❖ Considering He is the everlasting life after He gives Himself to those who believe in Him, that is to say "that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith" (Eph 3:17). Saint Cyril the Great

❖ Would that what follows urges us: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life." He wishes to declare Himself who He is. He says, he who believes in Me possesses Me. For, Christ Himself is the real God and everlasting life. He, therefore, says, he who believes in Me dwells in Me, and he who dwells in Me, I am for him. And what does "I am for him" mean? That he has everlasting life.³²⁵ Saint Augustine

"I am the bread of life." [48]

"Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead." [49]

That manna did not keep their bodies from death, nor did it grant them everlasting life. This is as they understand it because they believed their fathers died in the wilderness and they did not have everlasting life. Their eating of the manna did not preserve them from the wrath of God that descended on them because of their continual rebellion and complaint in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:3-5).

+ He institutes something to attract them; that is that they suppose they are capable of higher affairs than their fathers (meaning the amazing people who lived at the time of Moses). Therefore, after He says that those who ate the manna are dead, He continues "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" [51].³²⁶ Saint John Chrysostom

**"This is the bread which comes down from heaven,
that one may eat of it and not die." [50]**

In accordance to that, the LORD came to offer His body as bread that supports their bodies, glorifies them and grants them communion with the spirits forever.

❖ The Son only and truly is the bread of life. Those who have communion in Him once and are combined with Him in some manner through their communion with Him are shown to be above the bonds of death itself. We have said several times that the manna is rather a symbol or shadow of Christ. It represented the bread of life. We are supported by the Psalmist in this who shouts in the spirit "[He] had rained down manna on them to eat, and given them of the bread of heaven. Men ate angels' food" (Ps 78:24-25)...Here the words are addressed to us because is it not foolish and extremely lacking knowledge to assume that the holy angels who are in heaven may,

³²⁵ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 26:10.*

³²⁶ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.46:2.*

in spite of their incorporeal nature, be able to share with us a material dense food?
Saint Cyril the Great

❖ To this present day we accept the visible food, for the mystery is one thing and the action of the mystery is another thing.

How many are those who partake of the communion on the altar and die? They truly die through that communion. For this reason, the apostle says, “eats and drinks judgment to himself” (1 Cor 11:29). For, was not what he took in his mouth of the LORD poison for Judas, and yet he took it and when he partook of it, the enemy entered him, not because what he took was an evil thing, but rather because he was evil; he partook of what is good in an evil manner.

Therefore, behold, brethren that you partake of the heavenly bread in a spiritual sense. Present purity to the altar.

For though your sins are daily, at least let them not be deadly.

Before you approach the altar, take into consideration to say well, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” You forgive and, consequently, you are forgiven.

Approach in peace, it is bread, not poison.

However, behold, if you say you forgive but do not forgive you lie; you lie to who is not deceived. You can lie to God, but you cannot deceive Him.³²⁷ Saint Augustine

**“I am the living bread which came down from heaven.
If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever;
And the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” [51]**

I die for the sake of everybody, so that I may give life to all, Myself. I have made My flesh a sacrifice for all because death will die in My death and with Me the fallen human nature will rise. For this reason I have become like you, O man. I became an offspring of Abraham in order that “in all things He had to be made like His brethren” (Heb 2:17).

❖ The body of Christ gives life to all that partake in Him because He expels death. He comes and enters the dead to eliminate corruption, for (the body of the Word) is entirely full of the Word that removes corruption. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ Let not your mouth, but rather your heart be ready...When we accept Him we think in Him. We accept only a little and rejoice in the heart. What nourish us is not what we see, but rather what we believe in. Therefore, we do not require what touches our exterior senses. We do not say ‘Let those who see with their eyes and touch with their hands the LORD Himself after His resurrection, believe. If what is said is true that we did not touch Him, why then do we believe?’³²⁸ Saint Augustine

³²⁷ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 26:11.*

³²⁸ *Sermons on N.T. Lessons, 62:5.*

Saint John Chrysostom points out the fruits of the Eucharist:

❖ Those who partake of the Eucharist (the Body and Blood of the LORD) are granted a calm spirit, forgiveness of sins, communion of the soul, attaining the heavenly kingdom, liberty with Him rather than judgment and condemnation.³²⁹ Saint John Chrysostom

Saint Irenaeus describes the Eucharist as the Bread of Eternity. Likewise, Saint Ignatius of Antioch calls the Eucharist, the Eternal Remedy.³³⁰

❖ In the last days He summed up everything in Himself. Our LORD came to us not in His own capability, but rather in accordance to what we can see. Truly, He could have come to us in His inexpressible glory. However, we were not able to endure the greatness of His glory. Therefore, the Perfect Bread of the Father offered Himself to us in the form of milk because we are small children. Thus He came as a man so that we may eat, I say, from His very Body, and with this milk secretion we get accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God and so carry in us the Bread of Eternity, that is the Spirit of the Father.³³¹ Saint Irenaeus

“The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, ‘How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?’” [52]

Saint John Chrysostom comments on this statement saying that it was not appropriate for the Jews to argue in this manner after witnessing the miracle of the five loaves. In his comment, he also writes:

❖ We need to understand the sacraments, what they are, why they are granted and what benefits we get through them.

We become one body and “members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Eph 5:30). If only the partakers of Communion follow what I say! So that we may become one not through love only, but in the very fact, we unite with that Body. This is realized with the food that He offered to us without charge, yearning to reveal His love for us. For this reason, He mixed Himself with us and blended flesh with our flesh in order that we may become one, like a body united with the head...

Christ guides us toward a true friendship, so that He may reveal His love for us. He grants those who desire Him, not only that they see Him, but also that they touch, eat, stick their teeth into His body, that they accept and be filled with their love for Him.

Would God we return from that table like lions breathing flames that terrify Satan, thinking of our Head and of His love that He revealed to us.

In most cases the fathers introduce their children to others to feed them. As for Him, He says, ‘As for Me, I do not do this. I feed you with My body, wishing that you all be born again and have good hope in the future.’ For He who gives you Himself here, how much more He will give you later.

I desired to become your brother. For your sake I associated Myself with you in flesh and blood. I again give you the flesh and blood to be related to you.

³²⁹ *The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, prayer after the Epiclesis.*

³³⁰ *Ad. Eph. 20:1.*

³³¹ *Adv. Haer 4:38:1. PG 7: 1105-6.*

This blood renews the image of our King in us. It radiates inexpressible beauty and hinders the sublimity of our spirits from being taken from us; but rather waters and invigorates it perpetually.

Blood that is extracted from our food does not become blood immediately, but becomes something else. As for this Blood, it is not so; it rather at once quenches the thirst of our spirits and acts in them with great power.

This secret Blood, if we take in truth, repels the evil spirits and keeps them far from us, while summoning angels and the LORD of angels to us. For, as soon as the evil spirits see the Blood of the LORD, they run away, while the angels come...He shed this Blood and caused heaven to be easily attained.³³²

❖ Truly, the ecclesiastical sacraments are awe- inspiring. In truth, the altar is awe- inspiring. A spring flows from Paradise and overflows in actual rivers. From this table, a spring is brought that produces spiritual rivers.³³³ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ The LORD of all, Himself, requires us to be so as the prophet Isaiah says, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the LORD. For as heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Is 55:8-9) However, He who excels us immeasurably in greatness of wisdom and power, how can He not do something wonderful that surpasses our understanding?

If you, O Jew, insist saying ‘how?’ I also say to you

How did you go out of Egypt?

How did Moses’ rod change into a serpent?

If you always use the word ‘how’ you will not believe in the whole Bible and you will reject the sayings of the saints.

❖ Those who believe now can also learn; because this is what Isaiah the prophet says, “If you will not believe, you will not understand” (Is 7:9 LXX). Therefore, it was right that first, faith becomes firmly rooted in them, then will follow the understanding of things they do not know. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ Like Nicodemus who was confused and said, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4), similarly those were confused and asked, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” Saint John Chrysostom

❖ The believers recognize the Body of Christ is they do not neglect being the body of Christ. They become the body of Christ when they desire to live in the spirit of Christ.³³⁴ Saint Augustine

**“Then Jesus said to them,
‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man
and drink His blood, you have no life in you.’ [53]**

❖ If with a touch of His holy body only (in the raising of Jairus’s daughter, Luke 8:54

³³² *Homilies on St. John, Hom.46:3.*

³³³ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.46:4.*

³³⁴ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 26:13.*

and the raising of the widow's only son, Luke 7:12-14) He gives life to a decaying body, how may we not benefit with the greater wealth of blessing (the Eucharist) of which we partake! When we taste it we obtain Him who grants life. For it will surely be transformed for our personal good which is eternal life...

We, who by nature are prone to physical corruption, abandon our natural weakness by mingling with Life and change into the quality of life. So, this does not just require a re-creation of the spirit through the Holy Spirit toward everlasting life; but rather this earthly coarse body needs to be sanctified and called unto incorruption through the denser and nearer participation. Saint Cyril the Great

Saint Cyril the Great is astonished that the Jews who believe that by eating the paschal lamb and sprinkling its blood on the doors, they escape from death and are considered holy, still do not believe that by partaking of the Body and Blood of the Lamb of God they obtain everlasting life.

❖ When both His Body and Blood gave us vigorous health, and in short, the big question concerning perfection (that is to say with Christ the head and the Church the body) arose, would God those who eat continue eating and those who drink continue drinking. I wish that the hungry and thirsty eat Life and drink Life... For, it will be so; the Body and Blood of Christ will be Life for the human being. If what we take in the sacrament is a visible thing; yet in truth we eat and drink that spiritually.³³⁵ Saint Augustine

❖ It is not permitted for anyone to partake of the food called "Eucharist" unless (a) he believes that what we preach is true (b) he washes with the water of the forgiveness of sins and the new birth, and (c) he lives as Christ taught us. For, we do not accept that as ordinary bread and drink. Rather, that Jesus Christ our Savior became flesh through God's Logos. He took flesh and blood for our redemption. This is what we learned that the food sanctified by the prayer which is His words; this food that enlivens our; body and blood through transmutation from the Body and Blood of Jesus who became flesh and blood.³³⁶ Saint Justin the Martyr

❖ There is no doubt whatsoever concerning the truth of the Body and Blood. For, now with the declaration of the LORD Himself and our faith, this is true Body and true Blood and what we eat and drink take us across so that we exist in Christ and He exists in us.³³⁷ Saint Hilary Bishop of Poitiers

❖ We offer Him what is His rightly the partaking and union of the body and spirit. For, when the bread, which is a product of the earth, accepts God's call, it is transformed from ordinary bread into the Eucharist containing two realities, the earthly and the heavenly. Likewise, when we accept the Eucharist, our bodies become incorruptible because we hope for the everlasting resurrection.³³⁸

❖ He saved us with His blood... and as we are His members we also are animated by means of His creation...
He knows the chalice (it is part of the creation) that it is His Blood with which He

³³⁵ *Sermons on N.T. Lessons, 81:1.*

³³⁶ *The Faith of Christians, First Apology, 65-67.*

³³⁷ *On The Trinity, Book 8:14.*

³³⁸ *Adv. Haer. 4:18:5.*

moistens our blood. And He knows the bread (which is also part of the creation) that He elevates as His Body and from which He grants growth to our bodies...Therefore, the mixed chalice and broken bread...become the Eucharist, the Blood of Christ and His Body giving growth and support to our body. How can the heretics assert that the body is unable to accept the gift of God which is everlasting life, which animates (the body) with the Body and Blood of the LORD and become a member in Him? The blessed Paul declares that we are “members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Eph. 5:30).

He does not say this about the spiritual, unseen man, for the spirit has neither bones nor flesh; but he indicates this provision by which the LORD became a real man having flesh, nerves and bones. The chalice that is His Blood and grows in the Bread that is His Body animates this Body

Thus, also He enlivens our bodies, and when buried and decomposed in the earth, they will rise at the right time and the Logos will grant them resurrection for the glory of God the Father. He is who freely grants the dead immortality, and the decaying incorruption; for God’s strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9)³³⁹ Saint Irenaeus

❖ There is a chalice with which the inner rooms in our spirit are purified. This chalice is not in accordance with the old provision, nor is it filled with public honor. This is rather a new chalice that comes down from heaven to the earth (John 6:50-51) filled with wine pressed out of an amazing cluster hung in the shape of a body on the wooden cross, like a bunch of grapes hanging on a vine. This is the cluster from which is the wine which cheers man’s heart (Judges 9:13). It removes sadness, pours in us and carries the smell of wonder which is that of faith, true piety and purity.³⁴⁰ Saint Ambrose

“Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” [54]

❖ He did not say ‘He came to pass in flesh’, but ‘He became flesh’ to clarify the unity. And, we do not say that God the Word, who is of the Father, changed into the nature of flesh, or that the incarnation changed into the Word....But in an inexpressible manner that surpasses human understanding, the Word united with His particular body and He joined it all to Himself...He expelled corruption from our nature and also removed death which ruled since old times because of sin. Therefore, whoever eats the holy Body that is Christ’s has eternal life, because this Body has the Word that is for Life by nature. He, therefore, says, “and I will raise him up at the last day.” Instead of saying, “My Body will raise him up”, that is to say, will raise whoever eats My flesh, He puts the pronoun “I” in the statement “I will raise him up.” Not as though He were different from His own peculiar flesh, for after the unity, the separation into two is forever impossible. He, therefore, says, “I, God, became in him, through My distinctive flesh. That is, I will raise up at the last day the person who eats My flesh. For, it was truly impossible that He who is life by nature would not conquer corruption with certainty, and would not prevail over death.” Saint Cyril the Great

Saint Cyril the Great observes that the LORD Christ granted us His Body that gives life, like yeast thrown in us so that the dough is leavened. And as the leaven is in the

³³⁹ *Adv. Haer.* 5:2, 3.

³⁴⁰ *On the Christian Faith, Book 2:20:135.*

dough, so is the dough in the leaven. Similarly, Christ abides in us and we in Him. Once more, He offers us His Body and Blood like seeds in our depth “Thus, our LORD Jesus Christ hides life in us through His distinctive Body and plants it like a seed of immortality and removes all corruption in us.”

❖ Lest they think that the promise of eternal life through this food and drink is in a manner that they do not die now physically, He condescends to confront this thinking. He says, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life”, and immediately completes, “and I will raise him up at the last day” [54]. Thus, it is in spirit that he has eternal life in the tranquility that the spirits of the saints receive. As for the body, eternal life will not be taken from it; on the contrary, it will obtain it in the resurrection of the dead at the last day.³⁴¹ Saint Augustine

**“For My flesh is food indeed,
and My blood is drink indeed.” [55]**

❖ What does He say? He wishes to say that it is true food that saves the spirit For, He affirms to them...that it does not befit them to consider His words a puzzle or a parable. They rather must know in particular that there is a need for eating the Body.³⁴² Saint John Chrysostom

❖ The manna food satisfied the need of the body for a very short time. It eliminated the pain of hunger, but after that it had no power and did not grant those who ate it eternal life. So, this was not the true food and the bread that comes down from heaven. As for the holy Body that is Christ’s that nourish to immortality and to eternal life, this is indeed the true food. They drank water from the rock also...but what did those who drank benefit by that, for they died. That was not the true drink, but rather the true drink is in fact the precious Blood of Christ that removes corruption from its root and gets rid of death that dwells in the human body. Saint Cyril the Great

“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.” [56]

❖ Christ nourishes His Church with these sacraments, for they strengthen the essence of the spirit.

Therefore, the Church seeing this great blessing encourages her children and friends to come together to the Sacrament. The Church says, “eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.” (Song of Solomon 5:1). What we eat and what we drink are revealed elsewhere in the statement, “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him.” (Ps 34:8).

In this Sacrament, Christ who is the Body of Christ is not a corporeal, but a spiritual food...This food as recorded by the prophet strengthens our hearts, and this drink makes glad the heart of man (Ps 104:15).³⁴³ Saint Ambrose

❖ What an awe-inspiring condescension! The Creator gives Himself to His creatures for their gladness.

Life gives Himself as food and drink to the mortal. He urges us, “Come; eat My flesh

³⁴¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 26:16.*

³⁴² *Hom.47. PG 59:275.*

³⁴³ *On the Mysteries 9:55, 58.*

and drink the Wine I have mixed for you. I have prepared Myself as food and mixed Myself for those who desire Me. Of My own will I became flesh; I shared your flesh. I am the wheat grain that gives life. I am the bread of life. Drink the Wine that I have mixed for you, because I am the drink of immortality. I am the true vine (John 15:1). Drink of the Wine that I have mingled (Prov. 9:5).³⁴⁴

❖ The smallest bit of the blessing (the Eucharist) mingles with our whole body and fills us with its powerful effect. Thus, Christ came to be in us and we also abide in Him. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ These days the teachers nourish you; Christ nourishes you everyday. His table is always ready in front of you. Why, O listeners, do you see the table and do not come to the feast?

Believers know well what the LORD says. As for you, catechumen, who are called to listen, you are deaf because your physical ears are open wanting to hear the words that are said, but your hearts' ears are closed since you do not understand what is said. Easter is near; submit your name for baptism...so that you may understand the meaning of ,”He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”[56]³⁴⁵

❖ How necessary is it for us to understand Him?

Do these words (“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him”) include even those about whom the apostle says, they “eat and drink judgment to themselves” (1 Cor 11:29) when they eat this Flesh and drink this Blood? Did Judas who sold his LORD and betrayed Him (although Luke the evangelist declares very clearly that Judas ate and drank with the other disciples the first sacrament of the Body and Blood, receiving them from the LORD’s hands) abide in Christ and Christ in him?

Do many of those who partake of that Body and drink that Blood hypocritically, or those who after partaking of the Body and Blood retrogress, abide in Christ and Christ in them?³⁴⁶ Saint Augustine

**“As the living Father sent Me,
and I live because of the Father,
so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.” [57]**

The statement, “I live because of the Father” as expressed in Greek carries the meaning that the cause of His life is the Father. Thus, the Son does not live alone, but the life of the Father is the life of the Son without separation.

❖ When the Son says that He was sent, He refers to His incarnation...Who takes Me in himself by partaking of My body will live and will be completely engrafted in Me. I am He who can grant him life, because I am of an origin that grants life, that is God the Father. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ Some people ask, how can the Son be equal to the Father, as He says that He lives because of the Father?

³⁴⁴ *Meditation on the Mystical Supper, Hom. 10. PG 77 in Toal 3:155-157.*

³⁴⁵ *Sermons on N.T. Lessons, 82:1.*

³⁴⁶ *Sermons on N.T. Lessons, 21:17.*

Would that those who oppose us in this point, tell us first what the life of the Son is. Is it a life granted by the Father to someone who is in need of life? Moreover, how can the Son be in need of having life, as He Himself is life, for He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life"?

Indeed, His life is eternal and His power is eternal. Was there a time when life did not have itself?

Contemplate what was read today about the LORD Jesus that He "died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him." (1 Thes 5:10). He whose death is life, cannot His Divinity be life, and we regard His Divinity as eternal life?

However, is His life truly in the power of the Father? Why?

He has revealed that even His physical life was not in the power of another. He states, "I lay down My life that I may take it again. 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. This command I have received from My Father."

Therefore, how can His Divine life be looked upon as though it depended on the power of another, if His physical life is not subject to any power but His own power? Yet, there is another power for the sake of the unity of power. That is as He gave us to understand that He lay down His life through His own power and His completely free will. Likewise, He also teaches us that He lay it down in obedience to His Father's command. Here is the unity of His will and the will of His Father.³⁴⁷ Saint Ambrose

"This is the bread which came down from heaven not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." [58]

❖ The prophet Malachi, one of the twelve, had already proclaimed, "I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen" (Mal 1:10-11). These words indicate clearly that the ancient people (the Jews) will stop giving offerings to God. However, in every place a pure offering will be offered and the name of the LORD will be glorified among the Gentiles. But, what other name will be glorified among the nations like that of our LORD, by whom the Father is glorified and man also? And because this is the name of His Son who was incarnate by Him, therefore He calls Him "His name."³⁴⁸ Saint Irenaeus

❖ It is appropriate for the Eternal to give that which is eternal, rather than give temporary pleasure with food that can hardly last for a few moments...It is suitable for Him who came down at that time to place those who partake of Him above death and evanescence. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ So, we live because of Him, because we partake of Him, that is we partake eternal life that is not ours of ourselves.

On the one hand, He lives because of the Father who sent Him when He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of the death of the cross (Phil 2:8)....

He says, "I live because of the Father" meaning that He is of the Father, not that the

³⁴⁷ *Of the Christian Faith, 4:10:108-122.*

³⁴⁸ *Adv. Haer. 4:17:5, 6.*

Father is of Him. This is said without effect on Their equality. As for saying, “he who feeds on Me will live because of Me”, this does not mean that His equality with the Father is similar to our equality with Him. He rather clarifies the grace of the intercessor: “This is the bread which came down from heaven” [58].

We live because we eat Him, for we cannot have eternal life of ourselves. He says, “not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever” [58]. Those fathers are dead, means they did not live forever (by means of the manna). As for those who partake of Christ, they certainly die temporarily, but will live forever because Christ is eternal life.³⁴⁹ Saint Augustine

“These things He said in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum.” [59]

They saw Him teaching everybody openly in the synagogue, as He Himself says through Isaiah also, “I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth” (Is 45:19) for He said those things openly. Saint Cyril the Great

Saint John Chrysostom observes that the LORD Christ delivered His speech at the synagogue for two reasons. The first was to get hold of the largest number possible of His enemies. The second reason was that He wanted to stress the point that He does not oppose the Father. Therefore, if they serve God in the temple, He does not avoid the temple, but rather considers it the house of His Father in which He teaches.

5. The Complaint of Some

“Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’” [60]

It is clear that besides the twelve disciples, there were many who accompanied Him. Some of them found His talk, concerning His celestial being and His offering of His Body and Blood for everlasting life, difficult and they went away.

❖ The spiritual person cheers himself with our Savior’s words and shouts in truth, “How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Ps 119:103). As for the worldly, he, in ignorance, considers the spiritual mystery, foolishness...It is appropriate for him who rushes toward true faith in Christ, to travel across a royal path. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ The LORD gives us His Body to eat. If we understand this as corporeal, this is death. But He says about His Body that it has everlasting life. Therefore, we need to understand the Body not in a corporeal sense.³⁵⁰ Saint Augustine

“When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, ‘Does this offend you?’” [61]

By saying this to His disciples He made it clear to them that He is divine and knows their hearts. And, as He cannot be deceived by appearance, He also does not deceive

³⁴⁹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 26:19-20.*

³⁵⁰ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:1.*

others. In this He made it evident for them that He is God and His teaching is the truth.

“When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this” [61]. He knew their inner thoughts by His divine power, for nothing is hidden from Him. His knowledge was not through divine revelation as in the case of some prophets. He is the divine Word who discerns the thoughts of the heart (Heb 4: 12-13). Therefore, we must sanctify not only our spoken words and apparent behavior, but also our thoughts with His Holy Spirit.

“What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?” [62]

Here, He hints at His ascension into heaven because the delight with the Body and Blood of the LORD grants us an exaltation of the heart, mind and all our inner self so that we may enjoy the participation with the divine Christ.

❖ Christ used this meaning when He spoke with Nathaniel. For He said to him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree’, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” (John 1:50). Also in His discussion with Nicodemus, He said, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.” (John 3:13) Saint John Chrysostom

❖ They did not recognize the beauty of the Sacrament, nor that excellent provision concerning it. Moreover, they discussed it among themselves, how can a human body plant in us everlasting life; how can a thing of our same nature grant immortality? When Christ knew their thoughts, because all things are naked and open to His eyes (Heb 4:13), He again cured their illness and guided them with His hand in various ways so that they may understand those things they still ignored.... If you suppose that My body cannot grant you life, how can it ascend to heaven like a bird? For, if it cannot give life because it is not in its nature to give life, how can it fly into the air and ascend to heaven? For this is also impossible. However, He who has made this earthly body, heavenly, He will make it grant life also even if its nature disintegrates according to its particular being. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ He said to them that He will ascend to heaven surely in His whole being “if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before” [62]. Then, you will surely at least see that will not be in that way you think He will distribute His Body. Then, they will certainly realize that His grace is not consumed through eating.³⁵¹ Saint Augustine

**“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.
The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” [63]**

❖ When you look closely at the mystery of the Incarnation, you know who He is who came in that body. You then will surely feel, without considering the Divine Spirit Himself also that this Body can grant life though that flesh in itself profits nothing at all. For, if the flesh unites with the Word that gives life, the flesh will grant life entirely rising to the supernatural power without obliging the insubordinate to change to that particular nature. Saint Cyril the Great

³⁵¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:3.*

❖ “It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing.” This is what He says, ‘There is a necessity that you continue listening spiritually to the things concerning Me. Whoever listens physically, profits nothing, nor does he gain any goodness.’ It is a carnal matter that you despise Him who came down from heaven, and you think He is the son of Joseph.

“How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” [52] All this attitude is corporeal. However, there is a need to understand these words with the soul, spiritually...

“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” [63] This means that they are divine, spiritual words. They have nothing that is corporeal or that follows the rules of nature. They, rather, are free of such needs and are above the laws that came down to govern this world. They also have a different meaning.

Now as in this statement, He says ‘spirit’ instead of ‘My Spirit.’ Therefore, when He speaks about flesh, He does not mean things of the body, but listening bodily. He, at the same time, points out to those who always ask for the physical, when they should ask for the spiritual, that if they accept His words bodily, they will profit nothing. What then, is His body not flesh? It certainly is. How then does He say, ‘the flesh profits nothing’? He does not speak about His flesh, God forbid! He speaks rather about those who accept His words in a physical way. What does physical understanding mean? Looking at what is before our eyes merely without imagining what is beyond. This is physical understanding. However, it befits us not to judge by sight, but to behold all the sacraments with the inner eyes. This is ‘spiritual vision.’³⁵² Saint John Chrysostom

Saint Augustine wonders, how does the LORD Christ say ‘the flesh profits nothing’ [63], whereas the Word became flesh, and He Himself gives us His flesh? Saint Augustine answers, that the statement here is like the saying, “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Cor 8:1). Thus, knowledge without love puffs up; yet this does not deny the importance of knowledge. Likewise, the flesh without the Spirit profits nothing. Consequently, he who accepts the Body of Christ in a bodily manner is similar to the person who eats sheer material food and his partaking of it has no profit for him. “Add the Spirit to the flesh, like adding love to knowledge. If through the flesh Christ profits us much, does the flesh profit nothing? It is by the flesh that the Spirit works for our salvation. The flesh is a vessel filled with the contents, not as what it is (alone). Did He not send His disciples, and did their bodies profit nothing? If the bodies of the apostles profited us, is it possible that Christ’s flesh profits nothing?...Therefore, ‘It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing’ is in accordance to the understanding of the flesh, not as ‘I give My flesh to eat.’”³⁵³

❖ It is the Spirit that gives life to us the members... This is said so that we may love union and fear schism. Nothing a Christian should fear like his separation from Christ’s body and, in consequence of not being a member of Christ, he does not live by Christ’s Spirit. The apostle says, “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” (Rom 8:9)³⁵⁴ Saint Augustine

³⁵² Hom 47. PG 59: 277-278.

³⁵³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:8.*

³⁵⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:6.*

**“But there are some of you who do not believe.’
For Jesus knew from the beginning who were who did not believe,
And who would betray Him.” [64]**

The statement here concerns Judas who betrayed Him and also concerns those who left Him. He declares that what will happen is not strange to Him because from the beginning He knew everything. He also shows that what happens is of His own complete free will. All souls are exposed before the LORD Christ. He knows the honest and faithful in their belief, and also the pretenders who behave hypocritically.

❖ He does not say, ‘there are some of you who do not understand.’ He tells us the reason why they do not understand, ‘there are some of you who do not believe’ [64] and, therefore, they do not understand. For, the prophet says, “if you will not believe, you will not understand” (Is 7:9 LXX). We are united by faith and live by understanding. Let us approach Him first by faith so that we may live by understanding. For who approach do not resist, and anyone who resists does not believe. How can the resisting live? He is the opponent to the ray of light by which he understands. He does not close his eyes, but shuts his mind. Therefore, “there are some of you who do not believe.” Let them believe and open up and be enlightened.³⁵⁵

❖ Judas was present there... The LORD did not mention his name. He described him, but did not mention his name. Yet, He did not stop talking about him, in order that all may fear, though one only will perish.³⁵⁶ Saint Augustine

**“And He said, ‘Therefore I have said to you
that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.’”
[65]**

This does not mean that God distinguishes between one group and another. It means that he who asks will receive. He who asks for the truth, the Father will deliver to him the truth and secure him in the Truth, and so he will not fall.

❖ In the case of those who did not believe in God in the wilderness, they were, therefore, restrained from entering the Promised Land. Similarly, those who do not honor Christ because of their disbelief will not be granted entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ It is an amazing thing that when preached concerning the crucified Christ, one listener scorns and the second listener esteems. Would that he who despises ascribes to himself this accusation (disbelief). As for the person who reveres, let him not claim for himself (his belief). When he hears the LORD Himself saying, “no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” [65] he must rejoice that he received. Let him with a humble heart, not with arrogance, offer thanksgiving to Him who granted that, lest what he obtained through humility he loses through pride.

❖ We believe and so are granted; for when we believe we are given that great gift. Therefore, rejoice that you believe, and if you have not grown yet, that is because

³⁵⁵ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:7.*

³⁵⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:7.*

“what do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor 4:7)³⁵⁷

❖ To teach us that belief itself is a gift and that it is not by rights, He says, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” [65] When the LORD says this, we remember the words of the Gospel as the LORD says, “No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him” [44]. He does not say “guides” him, but He says “draws” him. This force (in pulling) happens to the heart, not to the body. Why, then, are you astonished? Believe and you will come. Love and you will be pulled. Do not suppose here a type of cruel or difficult force. It is a gentle, delightful force and the pleasure itself draws them. What draws the flock when fresh grass appears and they are hungry? Nevertheless, I do not imagine a physical attraction. It is rather a quick relation to desire (to eat). In this manner you also come to Christ. Do not understand this as a long journey. Rather, wherever you believe you come. For, we come to Him who is everywhere. We come to Him by love, not by sail, since in this journey the waves of temptation are various and violent. Believe in the Crucified. Your faith will enable you to climb up to the cross. You will not drown. The cross will carry you. In this way, in the midst of the disturbances of the world he sailed, he who said, “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our LORD Jesus Christ.”³⁵⁸ Saint Augustine

“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.” [66]

❖ It is well that the evangelist does not say they “left”, but that they “went back” to the affairs they had left behind. He declares that they deprived themselves of any growth in virtue. By departing they lost the faith they had before. However, this did not happen to the twelve disciples.³⁵⁹ Saint John Chrysostom

Saint Cyril the Great observes that just as those who have weak sight go away from the sun and are pleased to sit in dark places, those who are mentally ill go away from Christ the sun of righteousness who reveals the great divine mystery. This is also what the people of Israel did when Joshua returned after spying into the Promised Land. They rebelled against him and went back. They lost Joshua’s company in crossing over to the Promised Land.

❖ That which is precious in the eyes of God is not at all the number of His worshippers. It is, rather, the exaltation of their true faith that is important, not their small number. For this reason, the Holy Book says that many are called, but a few come. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ This may have been written for our comfort. For, sometimes when a person announces the truth, he is not understood. He is opposed and his audience leaves him. This person is then sorry that he said the truth and he thinks, “It was appropriate for me not to speak in that manner. I should not have said that.” Behold, for this is what happened to the LORD. He spoke and lost many. Those who

³⁵⁷ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:7.*

³⁵⁸ *Sermons on N.T. Lessons, 81:2.*

³⁵⁹ *Hom 47. PG 59:279.*

remained with Him were a few, but He was not troubled. He knew from the beginning who will believe and who will not. If this happens to us we are bitterly alarmed. Let us find rest in the LORD and let us speak with dignity.³⁶⁰ Saint Augustine

6, To Whom Shall We Go?

**“Then Jesus said to the twelve,
‘Do you also want to go away?’” [67]**

The words of the LORD Christ addressed to the twelve are stern because He desires believers who trust Him and abide in the truth with all their free will without any coercion or difficulty. He chose them from the world, gave them the exalted sacraments, and offered them His capabilities. They were in touch with His divine life, and it remained that they decide, themselves, without hesitation, because they were about to walk the path of the cross. He said nothing to those who went back because He does not oblige anybody to believe. However, He used that situation to strengthen His disciples’ faith.

+ If I said, ‘Why did He not praise them?’ I would answer, ‘In that, He combined two aims. The first was to preserve the suitable rank of the teacher; for, if He had praised them, they would have thought that they had given Him a present. The second aim was to make it clear to them that He did not need them to follow Him.’ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ He did not rebuke those who left Him. Nor did He threaten them in a cruel manner. On the contrary, He turned to His disciples and said, ‘Do you also want to go away?’ Thus, He acknowledged the legal rights by which a man exercises his freedom and freely chooses his death or his salvation.³⁶¹ Cyprian the Martyr

**“But Simon Peter answered Him,
‘LORD, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life.’” [68]**

Saint Peter was distinguished by his extreme zeal and by being always ready. He, therefore, answered at once, not only for himself but also for all the disciples. He realized that they could not enjoy everlasting life without Messiah the Savior. Eternal death, hell and eternal suffering cannot overtake anyone who clings to the Savior. The world, the flesh, or Satan do not grant eternal life.

Some people did not accept the words of the LORD Christ and they went back. But some approached Christ even more and realized, with the apostle Peter, the power of Christ’s words that grant eternal life. His words have the fragrance of life for life, and the stench of death to death.

Saint Peter spoke in the name of all souls clinging to the LORD Christ. He spoke like Ruth who said to her mother-in-law, “Entreat me not to leave you, or to return from following after you; for where you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge” (Ruth 1:16). Peter spoke also like Nehemiah who courageously refused to leave his place of work, to hide in the temple and shut its doors, lest they kill him. Nehemiah said, “should such a man as I flee?” (Neh 6:11)

³⁶⁰ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:8.*

³⁶¹ Letter 59 to Cornelli: 7.

“LORD, to whom shall we go?” [68]. If we went to the Patriarchs, they would send us back to You. For, Abraham saw Your day and rejoiced. And if we went to Moses, he would give us the Law that guides us to You. If we went to the high priests, or the Scribes and Pharisees and sat at their feet, what would they offer except their hypocrisy and hatred of the truth? Who declares the truth to us but You? Who grants us eternal life but You?

❖ We need to sit beside the One and only teacher, Christ. We must adhere to Him continuously and never separate. He is our LORD who knows well how to guide our footsteps toward life without end....For, it befits us, thus, to rise to the heavenly divine dwellings and proceed toward the Church of the first born to feast with goods beyond human comprehension.

❖ As though they say, ‘We shall stay with You. We shall cling to Your commandments forever and accept Your words without stumbling.’ Saint Cyril the Great

Saint Cyril the Great observes that the events that took place during the journey of the Israelites in the wilderness, symbolize the truth that we now live. In the Book of Numbers, it is said that the real guide of the people of Israel was God. He appeared as a cloud that when taken up from the tabernacle, the people traveled, and ‘where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents.’ (Nu 9:15-18). In this same manner we must attach ourselves to the LORD. We must not move unless He commands us. “We cannot leave the LORD. We must rather strive to remain with Him spiritually. This is truly more appropriate for the saints.”

“Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” [69]

With spiritual wisdom, the apostle Peter gives priority to faith over knowledge without ignoring the role of knowledge. They believed in the Son of the living God and knew His mysteries by adhering to Him and participating with Him.

❖ The Word announced these teachings through His bride’s windows. She is the dove who responded to His beauty because she was enlightened by the ray of understanding and got to know the rock that is Christ. She says, “let me see Your countenance, let me hear Your voice; for sweet is Your voice and Your countenance is comely.” (Song 2:14)...Simon saw that which the bride wanted to see. Those who heard the sweet voice of Christ got acquainted with the grace of the Gospel and cried, “LORD, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)³⁶²
Saint Gregory of Nyssa

❖ They say they believe and know, so they link the two together. For, a person must believe and also understand. We accept the divine concerns by faith; but this does not mean that we avoid altogether examining those concerns. We rather try to attain a moderate knowledge as Paul says, “now we see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor 13:12). It is good that they did not say that they knew first, then they believed. They put faith first

³⁶² *Song of Solomon by St. Gregory of Nyssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, Sermon 5.*

followed by knowledge and not the opposite. For, it is written, “if you will not believe, you will not understand” (Is 7:9 LXX). Saint Cyril the Great

❖ Not that we knew and believed, but “we have come to believe and know” [69]. We believe so that we may know, because if we wanted to know first and then to believe, we would neither know nor believe...

What have we come to believe and know? “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” [69], meaning You are life eternal itself that You grant only by Your Body and Blood that are You.³⁶³ Saint Augustine

**“Jesus answered them,
‘Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?’” [70]**

The LORD Christ corrected Saint Peter by declaring that He was the one who chose them as His disciples and He knew that among them is a person who will be used by Satan who is a murderer from the beginning and does not know love, but only knows hatred and betrayal.

❖ I ask Him why He chose Judas the traitor? Why did He give him the moneybox, though He knew that Judas was a thief? Shall I tell you why? God judges the present, not according to the future.

He does not use His foreknowledge to condemn a person, though He knows that later that person will do something that will not please God.

Nevertheless, in His inexpressible goodness and mercy, He chooses a person who, He knows, will be good for sometime, but will veer to evil. He gives that person a chance to change and repent. This is the meaning of the apostle’s words, “not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance. But in accordance with your hardness and your unrepentant heart you are storing up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds” (Rom 2:4-6).

Adam did not sin because God knew beforehand that he would do so. God, being God, knew beforehand that which Adam will do with his complete free will.³⁶⁴ Saint Jerome

❖ He shows that those who withdraw from Christ will perish in their sin., As for the Church that believes in Him and abides in His teachings, she will never withdraw from Him. And those who remain in the house of God are the Church.³⁶⁵ Cyprian the Martyr

❖ His rebuke rouses their consciousness and causes each of them to be steadfast in regard to himself. For, He does not frankly say who will betray Him; He rather throws the yoke of offense on only one without clear definition. He, thus, makes them all face the challenge. He asks them to be more careful and vigilant, for each of them is terrified lest he should lose his life.

❖ He called the man who does the will of the devil, ‘a devil.’ This is so, because just

³⁶³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:9.*

³⁶⁴ *Against the Pelagians, 3:6.*

³⁶⁵ *Letter 59 to Cornellius: 7.*

as “he who is joined to the LORD is one spirit with Him” (1 Cor 6:17), so is the opposite also. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ Consider His wisdom. He did not declare the traitor (He did not mention his name). Yet, He did not leave him hidden. Thus, on the hand, the man will not be ashamed and become despised. But, on the other hand, lest he should think his behavior is not known, and offends without fear, the LORD rebuked him clearly gradually.³⁶⁶ Saint John Chrysostom

**“He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon,
for it was he who would betray Him,
being one of the twelve.” [71]**

The LORD Christ indicated much the traitor without hinting at his name so that He may give Judas a chance to repent and examine himself if he wished. Some would ask, “if Judas had changed his mind, how would it have been possible to fulfil the prophecies? How would our salvation have been achieved?” Certainly, God would have accepted Judas and the design of redemption would have been realized in a different way. The prophecies would have been fulfilled in a different person because the prophecies did not indicate the name of the betrayer.

❖ He was a denier of Him who offered him great benefit and honor. He took money and lost righteousness. As he was dead, he betrayed Life. He followed Him as a disciple, but persecuted Him like an enemy. All this iniquity is of Judas, but the LORD used Judas’s wickedness for good. Christ endured being in the place of betrayal so that He may save us. Behold, for the iniquity of Judas was transformed into goodness. How many martyrs Satan persecuted! If Satan had stopped persecuting them we, now, would not have celebrated the crowning of the martyrs... Thus, the evil done by the wicked harms him, but does not violate God’s goodness.³⁶⁷

❖ Let us, beloved, profit much by this aim that we partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, not in mere mystery, as many wicked people do, but in the Communion of the Spirit. We then abide in the Lord’s body as members and we live by His Spirit. Let us not be offended by many people who now partake of the Sacrament in a worldly manner, for they will have eternal punishment. Now, the body of Christ is as mixed and an object of study “but the LORD knows who are His.”³⁶⁸ Saint Augustine

Inspired by St. John Chapter 6

Your Wonderful Body Sanctifies My Body

❖ Your eyes always look at the multitude coming toward You.
They come to You and do not return empty.
You satisfy the hungry and quench the thirst of the thirsty.

❖ Like a lad I give You five loaves and two fish.

³⁶⁶ *Homilies on St. John, Hom.47:4.*

³⁶⁷ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:10.*

³⁶⁸ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:11.*

I give You the five books of Moses and the Gospels that You granted me.
I clear my perception to find in Your Book food to fill the crowds!
Yes, grant me that I sit down with Your people on the grass.
Grant our spirits inflamed by Your Spirit to guide and control our bodies.

❖ We sit down and through Your Church enjoy Your spiritual food.
We are filled exceedingly and the baskets of the world are full of the abundance of
Your grace.
You give our spirits drink and our bodies food.
You never leave us in want!
Our spirits are grateful for You are the source of all blessings!

❖ You came, O Word Incarnate.
So, we are not ashamed to ask You for our needs.
I confess to You, O Friend of mankind
My spirit groans under the burden of my physical desires.

❖ My screams have reached Your heavens!
Woe unto me a wretch, who will save me from my dead flesh?
Because of Your love, You, O Word of God, became flesh.
You lived among us as one of us!
We saw Your body not separate from Your divinity!
Your holy Body is the source of all holiness!

❖ You gave me Your Body and Blood, a true food and drink!
I enjoy them and abide in You and You in me!
I get engrafted into You, O True Vine.
Sin cannot control me again.
Neither can death overcome me
As long as I enjoy union with You!

❖ Your Body and Blood is remedy for my life.
They set me free from the sphere of corruption to incorruption
I withdraw my relation to the earthy Adam
And become Your son, O You Last Adam!
Instead of dust I become truly a heaven!

❖ Accept, O my Savior, my thanksgiving offering
I wished to take delight in the manna in the wilderness of Sinai!
But my fathers ate it and died!!
You now grant me Your Body and Blood
I partake of them and do not forever die
For I will live with You, sharing in glory as You promised.

❖ Your promises are truly great.
Who, but those whom You draw with Your love, can understand Your promises.
Many went back and did not walk with You.
They thought it hard to obtain what they could not understand.
But I cry with Your disciple
“LORD, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

I hear Your sweet voice and my whole being is attracted to You by love.
I hear Your voice and Your splendor shines in the depth of my soul.
I hear Your voice and my inmost being is silent so as to delight in the sweetness of
Your word!
How wonderful are Your words, and how generous are Your promises!
You are all love, O Savior of the world!



Chapter 7

The Lord Christ Speaks about Pentecost The Spring of Living Water!

The LORD Christ was late going to Jerusalem because the Jews wanted to kill Him. His relatives asked Him to perform miracles to show His followers, but He rebuked them. Then at the appropriate time He went up to Jerusalem. At the feast He announced the coming of the Holy Spirit who grants thirst quenching and joy.

The Jews habitually left their houses during the Feast of Tabernacles and dwelled in temporary tents for a week so that they may remember they were strangers and mere guests in this world.

During the first seven days of the feast they brought water from the pool of Siloam. The water was brought in a golden vessel and the high priest poured it in front of the people to declare that whoever is thirsty may approach and drink. This indicated the rock from which water flowed for the people in the wilderness. On the eighth day they did not bring water from the pool. This was to show that the people would drink from the springs of Canaan, not from the water of the wilderness. On that day, the LORD Christ who is the Supreme High Priest and Bishop of our souls, stood up to offer Himself as the spring that flows living water into the depths of the souls of believers. He asked the believers to drink joyfully from the wells of salvation (Is 12:3; Zech 14:8; Joel 2:28-32).

- 1 – Jesus Does not appear openly in Judea (1)
- 2 – The Dialogue about His Going up to Jerusalem (2-13)
- 3 – His Speech at the Feast (14-18)
- 4 – His Discourse about Breaking the Sabbath (19-24)
- 5 – Many Believe in Him (25-36)
- 6 – The Promise of Pentecost (37-48)
- 7 – The Testimony of the Officers of the Altar for Him (49-53)

1 – Jesus Does not Appear Openly in Judea

**“After these things Jesus walked in Galilee;
for He did not want to walk in Judea,
because the Jews sought to kill Him.” [1]**

The healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath aroused the anger of the religious leaders (John 5:16) and they sought to kill Jesus either by stirring up the people against Him or by indictment. For this reason, the LORD Christ preferred not to appear publicly in Jerusalem, and instead, to walk in Galilee. This was not out of fear of death, for He came to die for mankind. It was rather in wisdom until His time would fully come.

The Evangelist used the word “walked” which in Arabic is “frequented” to give us an idea about the life of the LORD Christ during His service. He chose no place where to stay to serve. Before He came to Galilee He used to go often to Judea and walk from town to town. That was the first part of His service that the other three evangelists did not refer to. He traveled to Galilee on foot, not riding a horse or even a donkey. He and those who accompanied Him walked from place to place and wherever He stayed He performed blessings.

The LORD Christ gives us a practical lesson in withdrawing from danger, not out of fear, but in order to serve, as He advised His disciples (Matt 10:23). However, if we are called to witness to His name and have no chance to leave that place, we should count ourselves unworthy to sacrifice ourselves for His name's sake.

❖ Saint Cyril the Great comments on this verse saying that the phrase "After these things" means "after all He said and did" Jesus began to walk gladly more in Galilee and did not want to walk in Judea. For, His presence among the Galileans (Gentiles) appeared to be much better than life with Israel. This is as Jeremiah says, "I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies (Jer 12:7 LXX). This is seen in the rites of the burnt offering, as the lamb is killed, not in front, but on the left side of the altar (Leviticus 1:10-11). The altar looked toward the east, so the lamb was toward Galilee, the church of the nations. Thus, "His eyes observe the nations" (Ps. 66:7).

But though He was welcome in Galilee, still the Cross followed Him wherever He was, whether in Judea, Galilee, or the capital Jerusalem. In Judea they sought to kill Him [1]. In Galilee, in spite of all His miracles, many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. And in Jerusalem the chief concern of the religious leaders was to get rid of Him by any means. They did not care to keep the law, but they sought to kill Him (John 7:19). The Sanhedrim sent officers to take Him (John 7:32). They spread the spirit of terror so much that no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews (John 7:13). They, moreover, took up stones to throw at Him (John 8:59).

Truly, He did not attack those who rose against Him. However, He did not, one bit, abandon His message and work of redemption even though that cost Him the shame of the Cross.

John, chapters 7 and 8 give us a living image of the extent of hatred, envy and malice in the hearts of the Jewish religious leaders at that time against the person of Jesus Christ. In their opinion, He distorted the image of the Promised Messiah. They wanted the Messiah to be in compliance with their human desire, but not conforming to God's magnificent plan.

❖ The people of Israel practiced extreme hatred against Him. He, therefore, was in better condition among His enemies. He made His dwelling with those who showed more tenderness than He found with His kin who should have loved Him.

We do not consider Christ's withdrawal a type of cowardice. We do not accuse Him of weakness, for He is omnipotent. We rather accept this as a divine provision because it befitted Him to endure the Cross for all at the appointed time and not before Saint Cyril the Great

❖ There is no worse evil than envy and spite for through them death entered the world (Wis 2:24). When he saw man being honored, Satan could not bear that and he, therefore, did all he could to kill man. Because of envy Abel was slain and David came close to being killed. Many other righteous people also we killed and the Jews became the murderers of Christ. Saint John Chrysostom

❖ He offered an example of our weakness. He did not lose His power, but He rather presented comfort for our weakness.³⁶⁹ Saint Augustine

2 – The Dialogue about His Going up to Jerusalem

"Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand." [2]

³⁶⁹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 28:2.*

The Feast of Tabernacles: This feast is celebrated on the 15th of Tisri (also called Tishreen, or Letham) which coincides with the last half of September and first of October. It is the seventh month of the religious year and the first month of the civil year. The feast took its name after the tents that were erected near the temple and at public places, in town squares, on house roofs, and in the gardens where the Jews lived. The booths remained for eight days in remembrance of the forty years the Jewish fathers lived in the wilderness. This feast is one of the three major feasts during which the Jewish men were obliged to go up to Jerusalem in accordance to the law.

The most important characteristics of this feast are great joy, dwelling in booths, and the unique rites distinguished by two complementary aspects that are light, and the pouring of water. The Jews used to go up to Jerusalem one day before the feast. Some Jews went up before the tenth day of the month to celebrate the Day of Atonement and stayed there until the Feast of Tabernacles.

Concerning the pouring of water, the Talmud records that beginning with the first day and for seven days, two great processions went out at dawn. One group collected olive branches, palm leaves, and leaves of other trees such as the willow and the myrtle. They tied the branches and leaves together with threads of gold or silver, or with ribbons. They carried them all day, took them to the assembly, and held them during prayers. On the following days, they carried them to the temple and walked round the altar singing, "Hosanna, we ask You deliver us!" Trumpets sound on every side. Saint John was probably referring to this feast when he spoke about the souls of the martyrs under the altar in Paradise (Rev. 6:9). They are given palm branches and they sing, "Salvation belongs to our God."

Nevertheless, the most joyful rites of the feast according to the Jews were to go with the second procession to the pool of Siloam. The high priest leading the procession carried a golden vessel that he filled with water from the pool and took back to the temple.

Groups of singers (choirs) accompanied both processions that returned singing praise adapted from Isaiah 12. "Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust, and not be afraid. For the LORD Jehovah is my strength and my song, and has become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall we draw water out of the wells of salvation." (Is. 12:2-3). The Coptic Church adapted the song, "The LORD is my strength, my praise, and has become my salvation" to be the doxology of the Pascha. This is considering the fact that the LORD Christ was taken out of Jerusalem to be offered as a Passover sacrifice for the salvation of the world. As the apostle Paul says, "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach." (Heb 13:12-13). Moses and Elijah spoke about this exodus with Jesus Christ during His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor (Luke 9:30-36). Thus, the Cross was associated with the Feast of Tabernacles as all the people leave their houses and live in temporary booths in preparation for entering the Divine Bosom eternally.

The two processions arrived at the temple at the same time. The morning burnt sacrifice was offered. Those carrying the branches made a beautiful booth over the altar. With three blasts of the trumpets the priests received the high priest who carried the golden vessel. The priest went up the steps to the altar and with him another priest carrying another golden vessel filled with wine. They poured the drink offering of water and wine in two golden perforated bowls that were suspended over the altar. The drink offering would then trickle down the altar. The people used to joyfully drink the water of the pool of Siloam during the days of the feast as a remembrance of

the water that flowed from the rock at the hands of Moses the prophet. That was the water that their fathers drank. They then remembered the words of Isaiah, “Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money; come, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.” (Is. 55:1; 12:3).

The Sadducees believed the drink offering should be limited to wine only. In about the year 95 BC the high priest was Alexander Pannias, a Sadducee. He poured the water on the floor far from the altar, so the Pharisees rose against him and wanted to kill him. A battle then began between the Sadducees and the Pharisees and ended in the victory of the Pharisees after the murder of more than six thousand men.

In any case, as the water and wine were sprinkled on the altar, the temple music was heard along with the chanting of the Hallelujah Psalms (Ps 113-118). As they sang “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!” “Save now, I pray, O LORD” “Oh, give thanks to the LORD” (Ps 118:1, 25, 29) the worshippers waved the branches around the altar.

The association of this feast with water becomes clearer when we know that on the second day of the feast (called the Smaller Celebration) there were merry evening festivals and the following days were called “The Joy of Water Streams.” The Talmud distinctly says, “Why was it called ‘Water Streams’? That is because the Holy Spirit overflows, as it was said, ‘With joy waters gush out of the fountains of salvation’”

On the seventh day they circled the altar seven times. This procession was called the “Hosanna rabba.”

During this feast many sacrifices were offered. On the first day they offered the usual burnt offerings and 13 bullocks, two rams, and 14 lambs. They also offered flour and wine. Besides, they offered goats as a sin offering. On the following days they offered the same but eliminated one bullock each day, so that on the seventh day they offered seven bullocks only. On the eighth day that was considered the climax of joy, they offered one bullock, one ram, and seven lambs as burnt offerings. They also offered one goat as a sin offering. Moreover they offered the usual flour and wine offerings. On that day they also brought to the temple the first fruits of their last harvest or that became ripe recently.

Moses instructed that the feast must be celebrated for eight days. However, the Jews added a ninth day which they called “Joy of the Law.” On that day they read the five Books of Moses.

The institution of this feast occurs in Leviticus 23:34. The feast was not observed for a long time, then it was reconstituted (Neh 8:14).

**“His brothers therefore said to Him,
‘Depart from here and go into Judea,
that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing.’ [3]**

The Holy Bible usually calls relatives in the same family ‘brothers.’ Therefore, the words “His brothers” probably mean the LORD Christ’s relatives, no matter what family relations might be. Those relatives, out of their love of appearance and honor, asked Him to go up to Jerusalem. They had two aims. The first was that His disciples who accompanied Him for two years in service, may see His glory in Jerusalem during the feast celebrations. The second aim was that He might establish His kingdom in the capital city. It may also be that these relatives who did not yet believe in Him –as the Evangelist himself points out- asked Him to depart not out of loyalty for Him, but with bad intention. On the one hand, they wanted to give Him advice as

to one who is unable to control even His own life and is in need of guidance. And, on the other hand, they were not thoughtful about His safety, for they knew how dangerous His appearance in Jerusalem was among the leaders who were filled with envy toward Him.

Some writers believe that they asked Him to go to Judea in order that the Pharisees and leaders may examine the miracles and wonders He performed and may so discover the deceptive tricks in them. This would then vindicate the disbelief of His relatives.

**“For no one does anything in secret
while he himself seeks to be known openly.
If You do these things,
Show Yourself to the world.” [4]**

They thought that our LORD Jesus shared their feelings and thoughts and that His miracles were not motivated by His love for others but were rather performed as a public demonstration. They, therefore, gave Him this advice so that He may take this opportunity to achieve His aim. He must not waste time in making miracles in Galilee, in towns and villages where ignorant people cannot support Him. He should better perform His miracles in the capital city so that He may win popularity among the important personalities in the community. Moreover, His fame will spread throughout the nation because, during the feast, men come to Jerusalem from everywhere. It is as though they say to Him, ‘If You are proceeding to be the Messiah, go into the Capital and reveal Yourself. For, You cannot become Israel’s Messiah while You stay in villages and small towns far from the assembly centers of the people and leaders.’

“For even His brothers did not believe in Him.” [5]

They did not believe He was the promised, expected Messiah. They probably thought He was an esteemed leader or a prophet. For, if He was the Messiah, the savior of Israel, He should reveal Himself to the whole world.

His relatives did not believe in Him. However, they asked for a public demonstration of His miraculous deeds so that the observers may admire them. They did not speak wisely for the sake of their salvation and the redemption of their brethren. It is written in Jeremiah, “For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee; yea, they have called a multitude after thee: believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee.” (Jer 12:6 LXX).

❖ Their words seem to come out of love, but they came out of malice. They accused Him of cowardice and of love of vainglory. The expression, “For no one does anything in secret” is addressed to cowardly people and to those who doubt that their deeds are real. Moreover, when they add “while he himself seeks to be known openly” they accuse Him of asking for vainglory.³⁷⁰ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ As they did not believe in Him, their words were motivated by envy.³⁷¹

❖ Why did they not believe in Him? The answer is that they asked for human glory. His brothers pretended they gave Him advice for the sake of His glory. They spoke

³⁷⁰ *Homilies on St. John 48:2.*

³⁷¹ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons 83:1.*

with the wisdom of the flesh to the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.³⁷²
Saint Augustine

**“Then Jesus said to them,
‘My time has not yet come,
but your time is always ready.’” [6]**

The LORD Christ answers in defense of His hiding all that time in Galilee by saying that He does not wish to anticipate the events, for His time has not yet come. He did not want to go to Jerusalem and arouse the leaders there until the time of His passion came according to His divine plan. He also made it clear to them that He would not go to demonstrate His miraculous deeds, or to win popularity and reveal Himself to the world, but rather He would go to achieve the purpose of redemption. They can go to Jerusalem as visitors, but He, this time will go to be examined and offered as the Passover sacrifice, for He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The time of His Passion had not yet come because this work of redemption was achieved in accordance to the divine plan. As for His relatives, they faced no danger since they were friends of the world. They could go anytime that they liked. Also the time for Him to go up to the feast had not yet come because He had a special arrangement for going up. As for them, they could go to the feast at any time. Here, He exposes the intentions of His brothers indirectly without hurting their feelings. As their intentions were bad and evil, the evil world did not hate them since their deeds were harmonious with the thought of the world. On the other hand, He will conclude no truce with the world that cannot bear Him.

❖ Your time is always ready. Where you are there is no danger. But, My time, when the time of the Cross comes, I must die. As this was the meaning, He made that clear when He said, “the world cannot hate you.”³⁷³ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ Whoever enjoys association with the LORD Christ must behave appropriately and prudently. He must know that every work has its particular time or the fullness of time. But those who behave recklessly and without constraint live as they like and any suits them without obligation. The time had not yet come for preaching without limit or for open and public announcement because the Jewish mind was not yet ready to understand. They could not accept My words without rebellion and anger. There was no opportunity yet for My call to be made known to the world. On the other hand, their time was present and always ready. They achieved their design and nothing hindered them or forced them to take suitable measures to be shown what they should do or not do, as was the case with Christ. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ Behold how Christ answers them very gently. He did not say to them ‘Who are you to give Me advice and teach Me?’ He rather said, “My time has not yet come.” Saint John Chrysostom

❖ They offered Him counsel to strive for glory. Their advice was worldly and with earthly provision. They wanted Him to be known and even become famous rather than to hide in obscurity.

The LORD answered those who offered Him advice concerning glory, thus, “My

³⁷² St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 28:4.*

³⁷³ *Homilies on St. John 48:2.*

time has not yet come.” That is to say, the time of My glory has not yet come.

Oh, how subtle this answer is!

They counsel for glory; He wants the glory preceded by humility. He desired to prepare the path for the same glory through humility. Those disciples certainly asked for honor to sit one on His right hand and the other on His left. They thought only of the aim, but did not see the necessary road to reach that aim.

The LORD drew their attention to the path through which they reach their homeland in the suitable provision. The homeland is high above; the road below on this earth is the life of Christ, that is Christ’s death.

That earth is Christ’s dwelling; the road is Christ’s suffering. He who refuses the road, how may he ask for the homeland? In short, He gave the following answer to those who also want glory “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” (Matt 20:22). Behold the way you must take to reach the heights you wish for. The cup that He alludes to is truly that of His humility and suffering.³⁷⁴

❖ Let us be upright in heart for the time of our glory has not yet come. Let us say to those who love this world the same as the LORD said to His brothers, “your time is always ready” [6]. Let us dare to say this, for we are the body of our LORD Jesus Christ, His members and we joyfully know our Head. Let us then say this without hesitation since He condescended and said it for our sake.

When those who love this world insult us, let us say to them, “your time is always ready, but our time has not yet come.” For, the apostle says to us, “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

When our time comes, he says, “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” (Col 3:3-4) Saint Augustine

**“The world cannot hate you,
but it hates Me
because I testify of it that its works are evil.” [7]**

The Jewish leaders cannot hate you because you carry their same thoughts. You desire a temporary messiah who will appoint himself an earthly king. You are the sons and servants of the world. Nothing but worldly matter preoccupies you, and the world certainly loves those who belong to it. As for Me, the world hates Me because I censure corruption and sin.

The LORD Christ did not want to go up to the feast with His relatives, lest they use propaganda on the pretext that it is necessary to declare Christ. Whereas it has been said about the LORD Christ that He shall not cry nor cause His voice to be heard (Is 42:2).

❖ The mind that evil pleasures enslave is really furious when urged to acquire the necessary self-possession. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ “The world cannot hate you” [7] Does this mean anything other than that the world cannot hate those who love it, who bear false witness? For they call evil things, good, and good things, evil. “But it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast.” [7-8] What does this mean? Since you ask for human glory; since you desire exaggeration in physical joy and do not contemplate eternal joy, on

³⁷⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 28:5.*

that feast day you aspire to human glory. But My time, that is to say, My time of glory, has not yet come. That shall be My feast. It will not precede, nor come after, these days, but will remain eternally. It will be rejoicing and unending joy, forever without end, calm without clouds.³⁷⁵

“I am not going up to this feast.” [8]

That is because He does not desire temporary glory. He rather teaches them a profitable lesson to correct and urge the people to the eternal feast. He wishes to turn their love for the world to love of God³⁷⁶ Saint Augustine

“You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come.” [8]

Saint Cyril the Great observes that His brothers or relatives here represent the Jewish people as a whole as they are all the LORD Christ’s brothers, His own. He asked them to go up to celebrate the symbol, for they still loved the shadow. But His pleasure is not in the symbol or shadow, but in the truth when the appropriate time comes and the fullness of time comes so that He may offer Himself a true feast.

❖ The LORD clearly says here that He will not observe the feast with the Jews. He will not go up with them and share their joy in the shadows. For, what is said about the few extends in meaning to all the Israelites, as all the multitude of the Jews are symbolically His brothers. He, therefore, refrains from attending the feast with them. According to a saintly prophet” saying, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols." (Amos 5:21-23) The Savior Himself also says, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24) Saint Cyril of Alexandria

Saint John Chrysostom says that Christ said He would not go up to the feast at that moment. That is to say He would not go up with them.³⁷⁷ He did not want to go up with them at that time to be crucified, for the hour of crucifixion had not yet come.

“When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee.” [9]

❖ He indicated in these words that He did not need them. He did not wish to flatter them, but He let them go to observe the Jewish ordinance. Saint John Chrysostom

❖ Christ remains joyfully away from Judea and in Galilee where He dwells more peacefully and safely. He reveals to them His true love for them and His rejection of the inhabitants of Judea. He has actually made the Church of nations worthy of divine love. He has disclosed the beauty of the Church of nations that He loved and went up to as to a bride in her room. Saint Cyril of Alexandria

³⁷⁵ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 28:8.*

³⁷⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 28:8.*

³⁷⁷ Hom 48. PG 59:285.

**“But when His brothers had gone up,
then He also went up to the feast,
not openly, but as it were in secret.” [10]**

He had refused to go with His relatives because they had demanded that not for spiritual profit, but to obtain honor because of the miracles.

Saint Augustine has dealt with the opinion of some concerning the LORD Christ when He said to His brothers that He will not go up to the feast and left them go to Jerusalem, then He later decided to go. Saint Augustine explains that the LORD does not say He will not go up to the feast, but He says, “yet” meaning today. As they celebrated the feast several days, He remained in Galilee that day, then went up to Jerusalem after that. His reason was that His brothers did not ask Him to go with them, in their company, but wanted Him to go alone before them. However, according to the saint, Christ appeared as a weak man running away from the resistant as He fled from Herod into Egypt. He, thus, let them go up to Jerusalem and the next day He followed. Saint Augustine observes that the LORD Christ went up at about the middle of the feast, which is after many days.³⁷⁸

The word “yet” that the LORD Christ uses shows that He refused to go up with them at that moment, but that His refusal to go up to the feast was not final. It is clear that in His words to them, The LORD Christ separates their point of view and His in going up to the feast. They will go to participate in the formal festivities and to meet their relatives and friends. They also considered the feast an excellent opportunity for the LORD to go up and expose His deeds to the people. However, He goes up to the feast to offer Himself the Paschal sacrifice for the world. He, therefore, desires to go up alone to isolate their thinking from His.

Moreover, their going up as a group will be openly accompanied with Praise, Psalms and palm leaves. But His will be as it were in secret to achieve a secret message that the world could not understand.

Finally, they went up to Jerusalem at once. On the other hand, He went from Galilee and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan (Matt 19:1; Mark 10:1). At the end of His journey He went to Bethany, a village near Jerusalem, to visit Lazarus and his sisters (Luke 10:38-39). He then entered Jerusalem about mid feast. So, His itinerary was completely different from that of His relatives.

❖ He does not say “in secret”, but “as it were in secret.” In this manner He uses this to teach us how we should conduct our affairs.³⁷⁹ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ In order that you may know the Almighty God who grants life, the Son of the All powerful, He adds a proof of His majesty by saying, “And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine.” (John 17:10)³⁸⁰ Saint Ambrose

**“Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said,
‘Where is He?’” [11]**

Some writers believe that this refers to the Jewish crowds or people. For, they yearned to see the Person who performed unique wonders. He was the subject of their conversation, even though they were divided into two groups concerning their

³⁷⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 28:10.*

³⁷⁹ *Hom 49, PG 59:287-288.*

³⁸⁰ *Of the Christian Faith, 5:7:93.*

perception of Him. However, the general opinion shared by the early church fathers and the contemporary scholars is that the word “Jews” here as in most verses in this Gospel, means, according to the Evangelist, the Jewish leadership including the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees. They were those who wished to get rid of Him, like King Saul who wished to kill David the first day of the month (1 Samuel 20:27)

Even those who admired the person and deeds of the LORD Christ, they did not know His reality. They thought He was only a righteous man. But they did not understand that He was the Son of God. Even today some people who do not believe in Him look up to Him as a unique, righteous leader. Yet they cannot become acquainted with Him.

They sought Him not because they believed in Him and looked for spiritual blessing, but to assail Him with insults. Saint Cyril of Alexandria points out that “they did not disdain to ask ‘where is that man’ or ‘where is He’ for this is an expression about a man who is rejected.”

❖ The Jews ask, ‘where is He?’ because of their intense hatred and hostility for Him they did not want to mention His name. Saint John Chrysostom

“And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, ‘He is good.’ Others said, ‘No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.’” [12]

The Greek word is translated here as “complaining” but in Latin it means “murmur.” Saint Augustine says that complaining and dispute occurred concerning Him. For, in this world we live as in winter. Some see in some kinds of fruit trees that they are dead. They do not realize that the trees live until summer that is the time of judgment. “Our summer is the appearance of Christ. ‘Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent’ (Ps 50:3). ‘A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about.’ (Ps 97:3) That fire burns the dry trees to which it is said, ‘I was hungry and you gave Me no food.’ While, on the other side, on His right hand, are seen abundant fruit and many leaves that will remain green forever.”³⁸¹

❖ In my opinion, the first group (those who said He is good) was the majority. The second point of view was that of the rulers and priests, for this calumny against Him fits their envy and wickedness.³⁸² Saint John Chrysostom

❖ Let them say about you if you are growing in Christ ‘he deceives the people.’ This was said about Christ Himself and is said about the whole body of Christ. Think that the body of Christ is still in this world. Think that the body of Christ is still under examination. How the chaff blasphemes about Him. The wheat and chaff will be threshed together; chaff will be burnt up and the wheat will remain. Therefore, this saying about Christ is for consolation when it is said about any Christian.³⁸³ Saint Augustine

❖ They waded into the most ridiculous fantasy; they deviate much from truth and yet they do not refrain from calling Him a ‘deceiver’ He who shows the straight path of righteousness. Saint Cyril the Great

³⁸¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 28:11.*

³⁸² *Homilies on St. John 49:1.*

³⁸³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 28:11.*

“However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews.” [13]

No one dared to speak about Him for fear of the Jewish leaders. The mere mention of His name was considered a crime that might lead to be deprived of the right to worship.

❖ Who were those who did not speak of Him for fear of the Jews? Certainly those who said ‘He is good’, not those who said that He ‘deceived the people.’ For, those who said He deceived the people were heard and their voices were loud like the sound of the leaves of dead trees. They raised their voice louder and louder.

Those who said He was good whispered, as they felt more and more oppressed.

Now, the Church grows because He graciously gave the Church to spread over the entire world. Now, only those who say He deceives the people whisper. Those who say He is good speak in a louder voice.³⁸⁴ Saint Augustine

❖ How incredible it is that the people fear the Jews and tremble but are not instructed by the Law and do not learn to live appropriately. For, fear is an evidence of the highest degree of slavery.

So, they were forced to transgress without examining the aim of Him who granted the Law (And, as they did not dare to praise the good) they judged wickedly, not willingly but by force according to the choice of the others. They despicably condemned Him who was worthy of praise and admiration.

The leaders were able to conduct them against the divine commandments and were thus responsible for the loss of all the people.

The prophet testifies saying about them that they were the cause of the eternal perdition of the people “the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD. Therefore all their flocks did not understand and shall be scattered.” (Jeremiah 10:21 LXX). Saint Cyril the Great

3 – His Speech at the Feast

**“Now about the middle of the feast
Jesus went up into the temple
and taught.” [14]**

He went to Jerusalem about the middle of the feast and as usual He went up into the temple and began to preach openly. Saint John does not record Christ’s sermon. This may be because another Evangelist registered it.

He went the fourth or fifth day of the feast in order that He may leave the people in the first three days to their preoccupation with the tents they erected and the branches they carried all day. They did not comprehend as desired the spiritual meaning of these things because their minds were not ready, or may be because they had no time to be attentive to the LORD’s words and deeds.

Why did He teach? He came to present the truth, in hope that men may yearn for true knowledge and enjoy it. By teaching He filled the vacuum caused by the preoccupation of the religious leaders with their own righteousness and honor and

³⁸⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 28:12.*

with politics instead of with interest in spiritual knowledge.

It is as though the LORD Christ occupied the status of teachers and revealed their inability to achieve their mission. He accomplished the promise “For thus says the LORD God; behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. . . . I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, says the LORD God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.” (Ezekiel 34:11, 15-16). “And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.” (Ezekiel 34:23).

❖ I suppose everybody truly wondered but that not all found the way to faith.³⁸⁵ Saint Augustine

How is it that He says, “My doctrine” and yet at the same time He says, “is not Mine”? It is the doctrine of the Father who sent Him. The evangelist had previously declared that Jesus is the Word of the Father. Therefore, Christ Himself is the doctrine of the Father; He is the Word of the Father and what Christ teaches is Himself so that the believers may acquire Him. He is His doctrine and at the same time He is of the Father. He is the divine unchangeable doctrine. This is not teaching that is pronounced with words and letters, but is the only One with the Father. He carries us to the Father for conciliation and conformity with His love.

❖ It is appropriate for us more reasonably to avow that we hear the will of the divine nature in particular in the holy places. Saint Cyril the Great

The evangelist did not present to us all the LORD’s teachings and sermons during this period. However, he presents three kinds of dialogue and conversation. A dialogue with the Jewish leaders [verses 14-24] another with the people of Jerusalem [25-30] and a third with the officers whom the chief priests and Pharisees sent [32-36].

**“And the Jews marveled, saying,
‘How does this Man know letters, having never studied?’ [15]**

The Jews marveled when they heard His teaching because He spoke with authority. He quoted from the books of the Old Testament. He explained, argued and said proverbs. His teachings are profound and convincing. They attract the simple people and satisfy the learned. They convince even those who oppose Him. It is written in the Gospel according to Saint Mark, “He entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” (Mark 1:21-22; see also Mark 6:2, Matt 13:54, Luke 4:22). He did not enter a school for the rich; He did not sit at the feet of a rabbi; He did not travel to some country as the philosophers did; nor did He enter a public school in His own country. Moses learned the wisdom of the Egyptians, but Jesus did not learn even the wisdom of the Jews. They did not realize that He did not need to receive knowledge from men, for He Himself is the Divine Truth and His will is one with the Father.

❖ Have you seen how the evangelist shows that their marveling at Him here was full of evil. For, the evangelist does not say that they marveled at His teaching or that they

³⁸⁵ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 29:2.*

accepted His words. Saint John points out that their astonishment was of a different kind. They were puzzled and said, “how does this Man know letters, having never studied?” They should have known and ascertained that their perplexity proved that His teaching was not of human beings. However, they refused to reveal this meaning and wanted to stop only at their amazement at Him.³⁸⁶ Saint John Chrysostom

Saint Cyril the Great observes that the frivolous people asked, “where is that Man” and so they confessed their ignorance. But those who said, “how does He know letters, having never studied”, considered themselves well learned and they judged Him. Owing to their knowledge they should have searched for the secret of His knowledge of the Books, though He did not study. They may have also compared Him and Moses and considered Him uneducated while Moses “was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22).

❖ Only Christ alone is good, perfectly good in all things. He is, among all, the only Person who has wisdom and understanding. And He has excellence not through learning but as a special characteristic.

All that is good is in God in essence. In Him it does not emanate from outside. Thus, wisdom is in Him also; He Himself is wisdom and in particular He is the source of wisdom. He grants partial wisdom to those who partake in Him, the heavenly rational beings and also the beings on earth. Saint Cyril the Great

**“Jesus answered them and said,
‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.’” [16]**

As they marveled at His knowledge, He declared to them that His doctrine does not originate from a school on earth, or from the rabbis and lawyers. His doctrine comes from the heavenly Father, since He is the Christ who saves the world. He says, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.” [16]

When Christ performed a deed of divine love, He confidently referred that deed of love to the Father as in John 3:16, lest some may think that the Father represents divine wrath and the Son is divine mercy. Later, certain groups, like the followers of Marcion went to the point that they believed that the God of the New Testament came to save the world from the cruel God of the Jews. For this reason, the LORD Christ explains that His divine plan is to accomplish the doctrine of the Father and His provision for the sake of the redemption of the world and that this is the good pleasure of the Father and of the Son.

When the Jews marveled that He knew the letters though He did not study, He made it clear to them that He did not need human teaching or wisdom, for He is the wisdom of the Father. The words He says are in harmony with the will of the Father. His doctrine is divine, not human.

❖ Once more He answers their secret thoughts by referring His teaching to the Father. In that He desired to silence them.³⁸⁷ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ He, suitably, reveals Himself as equal to God the Father who never studied but knows all things, essentially without learning. He excels all understanding and is above all wisdom existing in creatures. Therefore, it was possible for Him through

³⁸⁶ *Homilies on St. John 49:1.*

³⁸⁷ *Homilies on St. John 49:1.*

other events also to show to His listeners and affirm to them that all that is in the Father is in Him also because of their unity in essence. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ Does not His teaching that is free of rhetoric show that He teaches not as a human being, but as God? He did not study but He directs His teaching.³⁸⁸ Saint Ambrose

❖ Direct your thoughts towards Christ's doctrine, so that you may reach God's wisdom, and when you reach Him remember this "the Word was God" (John 1:1). Then you will discern the saying "My doctrine" is true. Contemplate the Word, who is He? (the Word of the Father) and you will truly understand "My doctrine is not Mine",³⁸⁹

❖ In short, it seems to me, dear beloved, that the LORD Jesus Christ said, "My doctrine is not Mine" meaning 'I am not of Myself.' We say and believe that the Son is equal to the Father, that there is no difference between them in nature and essence, and that there is no temporal separation between the begetter and the begotten. We fervently maintain that. But still one of them is the Father and the other is the Son. The Father cannot be Father without having the Son, and the Son likewise may not be Son without having the Father. Yet, the Son is God from the Father, and the Father is God but not from the Son. The LORD Jesus Christ is called Light of Light; both together are one Light, not two lights.³⁹⁰ Saint Augustine

**"If anyone wills to do His will,
he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I
speak on My own authority." [17]**

The LORD Christ gave them a proof that the origin of His doctrine is neither from an earthly school nor from a rabbi, but is of the Father. His divine doctrine is perfectly harmonious with His deeds. He came to the world submitting obediently to the Father so that He may remove from us pride and insubordination. He opened for us the path of perfect obedience when we united with Him so that we ask not that that is for us, but that is of God and we find our pleasure in this.

He is the way that leads us to enjoy the divine embrace through our participation with Him in obedience and humility. He, thus, opens the door for us so that we may receive the divine doctrine, not with argument, mere reasoning, and arid scrutiny, but with practical acceptance of the will of God in us and by conformity with His divine design for us. This will not be accomplished unless we practically unite with our Christ so that He may grant us perfect obedience, give us His righteousness and reveal to us His mysteries.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Thus, the source of our learning is the Holy Trinity. The Spirit illuminates the depth of our soul and the Son, the true light, enters and takes us to the Father's bosom so that we may live in the great mysteries and experience their guarantee in this world until the day when we meet Him.

❖ You ask, 'what is the meaning of Christ's words?' The answer is that He means to say, 'Remove your doubt, anger, envy, and hatred that originate falsely in you. There is no hindrance that prevents you from knowing that My words are truly God's

³⁸⁸ *On the Christian Faith, Book 2:9:79.*

³⁸⁹ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 29:4.*

³⁹⁰ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 29:5.*

words.’ Saint John Chrysostom

**“He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory;
but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him
is true; and no unrighteousness is in Him.” [18]**

The characteristic of the impostor or swindler is that he seeks his own glory and talks about himself. This is the characteristic of the antichrists and false prophets. They want to achieve their own will, not God’s will. But the mark that proves that Jesus is the true Christ is that His words are from the Father and He seeks the glory of the Father, yet Their will is one and Their glory is one.

The Son became flesh, but though He is the Son of Man, His doctrine is not the outcome of human experience. It is neither a temporal study, nor the fruit of a special thought. Its source is rather the Father who sent Him. It is a truly divine doctrine; there is no falsehood or fallacy in it.

“No unrighteousness is in Him” means ‘no falsehood or fallacy is in Him.’

❖ “He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory” [18]. This is he who will be called Antichrist and about whom the apostle writes he “exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped” (2 Thes 2:4). The LORD declares about the same person (the Antichrist) that he seeks his own glory, not the glory of the Father. The LORD says to the Jews, “I have come in My Father’s name and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive” (John 5:43).

He states that they will receive the Antichrist who will seek his own glory, who will be puffed up, disloyal and certainly destructive.

But our LORD Jesus Christ reveals to us His great example of humility. He who undoubtedly is equal to the Father, seeks not His own glory but the glory of the Father. How much more this befits you O man who when you do a good deed seek your own glory and when you do evil you offend God?

Know yourself; you are a creature.

Know your Creator. You are a servant. Do not despise your God.

You are adopted but not because you are worthy.

Seek the glory of the One who will grant you this grace that you are an adopted human being.³⁹¹ Saint Augustine

4 – His Discourse about Breaking the Sabbath

**“Did not Moses give you the law,
yet none of you keeps the law?
Why do you seek to kill Me?” [19]**

The LORD confronts the accusation of the rulers that He deceives the people [12] by accusing them that they break the law. How can He deceive the people when He accomplishes the will of the Father! They claim that they keep the law, but they break the law when they kill the innocent. Here, the LORD denounces them openly inside the temple touching their dearest claim, which is that they keep the law.

³⁹¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 29:8.*

❖ He did not accuse them of breaking the law as individuals, but rather that the entire Jewish nation nullifies the Law of Moses. In accusing Him of breaking the law concerning the Sabbath they reveal themselves as aggressors and conspirators plotting to kill Him. In so doing they commit the worst sin (killing the innocent). Saint Cyril the Great

❖ You seek to kill Me for this reason, which is that not one of you keeps the law. If you kept the law you would have known Christ in every letter of the law and you would not have killed Him when He was present among you.

Behold their answer: “You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You.”
What troubled the people? The truth. For, the impaired eyes cannot endure the brilliant light.³⁹² Saint Augustine

**“The people answered and said,
‘You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?’ [20]**

The rulers and those with them may have denied having a plot to kill Him, in order that they may not arouse the people. The people were, therefore, astonished. Besides, lest they appear as transgressors of the law for seeking to kill a man without trial or to kill an innocent person, when the LORD asked them, “Why do you seek to kill Me?” [19] they said, “Who is seeking to kill You?” As for the accusation “You have a demon”, this is often repeated when they find nothing to blame Him for or to oppose Him.

❖ The Jews were aware of the accusations and they tried to deny them even though they did not deviate from their intrigue of murder. However, with many endeavors they keep away from themselves the appearance of transgression of the law. For, the pride of the Pharisees is only in dissembling. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ He says, ‘No wonder you do not seek Me. For, you do not obey the law that you think you follow and you persist in that you received it from Moses. It is no new matter that you have no interest in My words.’³⁹³ Saint John Chrysostom

**“Jesus answered and said to them,
“I did one work,
and you all marvel.” [21]**

The work He refers to is healing the paralytic (John 5) on the Sabbath.

❖ On the basis of this one work, and though it was done for the salvation of a man lying on the ground to save his life, you condemn the Omnipotent for this reason? The commandment that according to your stupid conception He broke was infringed not for some trivial, worthless reason, but to save a man and his life. You are angry without cause. It was more appropriate that you praised Him who has such great divine power. Saint Cyril the Great

Saint John Chrysostom surmises that the work that the LORD Christ did was healing the man born blind on the Sabbath. The work He did was greater than the

³⁹² St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 30:2.*

³⁹³ *Homilies on St. John 49:3.*

circumcision that Moses ordered. The commandment of circumcision came to break the Sabbath also because they circumcised on the Sabbath if that was the appointed time. Indeed, the LORD did not say directly, 'I did a greater work than circumcision.' He said, "Moses therefore, gave you circumcision." [22]

**“Moses therefore gave you circumcision
(not that it is from Moses,
but from the fathers),
and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath.” [22]**

The circumcision was granted to them as a good gift, not as a burden. Its practice is not an infringement of the law. The commandment of circumcision was given a long time before Moses, since the time of Abraham (Gen 17:9-10). It was then incorporated in the Law of Moses as part of it, even though there is no commandment in the Law of Moses concerning circumcision.

The teachers of the Jews gave the commandment concerning circumcision more importance than the Sabbath. The Jews kept the circumcision ritual on the eighth day even if it fell on the Sabbath. Keeping the Sabbath was then not observed for the sake of public health. If that was the case concerning the practice of circumcision literally, how much more important was it for the sake of the safety of the entire man when all the members of the paralytic lying down in his bed for 38 years are healed.

The commandment of circumcision goes back to the time of the patriarchs before Moses the prophet. It does not go back to the beginning of creation. But the LORD Christ's deed concerned the being of a man naturally since his creation. For God desires the human being to be sound spiritually and physically since the beginning of creation.

Saint Augustine says, "As though the LORD Christ says 'As circumcision is specifically a kind of salvation seal and men must not stop the work of salvation on the Sabbath, you, therefore, must not resent Me because I healed a man entirely on the Sabbath [23]. For a man is circumcised on the Sabbath.'"³⁹⁴

Saint Augustine also says that circumcision on the eighth day was performed with a knife of stone. This was a token of removal of physical lust from the body. The LORD Christ, the true Rock, came to offer to the believer on the eighth day a spiritual circumcision through His resurrection. He says listen to those who were circumcised with the true stone. The apostle admonishes them saying, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." (Col 3:1-2) He speaks of the circumcised saying, 'Christ is risen. He has removed your physical lust, the evil desires, the unnecessary things with which you were born and the worse things you have added by living an evil life. If then you were circumcised with the Rock why do you still maintain your emotions on earth?'³⁹⁵

❖ Moses himself, the minister of the law, broke the law of the Sabbath to perform circumcision that extended from the patriarchs to the time of the Jews. Moses did that to prove that he kept the tradition of the patriarchs. And, as God works also on the Sabbath, He announces about Himself that He also works. This then is not a violation of the Sabbath, for He has the same thought as the Father. For this reason He says, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.'" (John 5:17)

³⁹⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 30:4.*

³⁹⁵ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 30:5.*

Moses was interested in honoring the tradition of the patriarchs more than in honoring the Sabbath. Why then are you falsely alarmed concerning Me and amazed as if I was eager to violate and despise the law, though I do a deed equal to that of the Father and conform always with Him in every intention? Since He works on the Sabbath, I refuse to be lazy on that day. Saint Cyril the Great

“If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the Law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?” [23]

Circumcision involves a wound, blood and pain. Yet, it is performed on the Sabbath that is a day for rest. What then is it in relation to the LORD Christ who grants healing to a man completely? If the painful work of the law is allowed on the Sabbath, is it not even more necessary that the joyful gospel that grants peace be practiced on the Sabbath?

The parents and relatives of the suckling are very anxious that the circumcised child be healed in that circumcised part. But the LORD Christ is concerned for making a man completely well.

❖ Circumcision is a means of care for man and is more important than the commandment concerning the Sabbath because it was necessary that the sick person be perfectly well. Why then is the Sabbath an obstacle, or how may it be reasonable that the ordinance of the Sabbath stand in the way of healing the whole body? For it is actually allowed without blame to break the Sabbath so that a small part of the body may be well. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ You see that we obtain the distinction of participation in the essence, not in the natural focus, but in that of grace. The reason is that the Father loves us. He loves the Son and consequently loves the members of His body.³⁹⁶ Saint Jerome

“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” [24]

The LORD Christ asks them to judge with righteousness, not according to appearance. For, the preoccupation with the letter, rather than with the spirit, ruins our judgment concerning matters of the law. The Sabbath as a day of rest is a day of mercy and love for the glory of God, for the edification of His people and the salvation of all as much as possible. Let their judgment concerning the healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath be in this spiritual conception, not in accordance to the letter.

❖ The law that you are so zealous in observing and for which you rose so fervently cries aloud to you saying, “You shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God’s (Deut 1:17). Thus, you who judge Me as a transgressor because of the Sabbath, and you decide it is perfectly right to be angry for this reason; do you care for the honor of the law? Mortify yourselves when you hear this message, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” For you exempted Moses from transgression and you rightly did not judge him in this even

³⁹⁶ *Against Jovinianus*, 2:29.

though he broke the Sabbath for the sake of circumcision that is from the patriarchs. Will you then, free the Son from blame; for He always agrees with the thought and will of the Father and every deed of the Father the Son also does?! How can you judge the Son only and not Moses also when they were both involved in the same act that you blame concerning the Sabbath? Saint Cyril the Great

❖ It is as though Christ says, ‘I did a deed more worthy and better than circumcision.’ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ Now in accordance to the Law of Moses you circumcise on the Sabbath. You do not judge Moses. However, when I made a man completely well you were angry with Me. “You judge with partiality, regard the truth!”³⁹⁷

❖ We do not think that this was not said for our sake because we did not exist at that time. Would we do not retrogress but look forward as He rebukes His enemies, for we ourselves do things the truth condemns.

Indeed, the Jews judged according to appearance. Consequently, they did not belong to the new covenant. They do not have the kingdom of heaven in Christ. They do not unite with the assembly of the holy angels. They wanted temporal things from the LORD: the Promised Land, victory over the enemies, many children, and abundance of fruit. These are things God truly promised them; real and good things He promised earthly people. All these things were given to them in the old times.

Now we are renewed, we have the new man because He who is the New Man came. For who is he who is thus new like Him who was born of a virgin? In Him is a new birth and in us is the new man.

Who is the new man? He is a man renewed from the old.

To what is he renewed? To someone who requests heavenly things and yearns for the eternal. His zeal is for the celestial home where he does not fear an enemy or lose a friend, where he lives well emotionally and lacks nothing.

We have a totally different hope from theirs. Would we do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment. We thus benefit by the Lord’s words; we profit by His words, and His grace helps us.³⁹⁸ Saint Augustine

5 – Many Believe in Him

**“Now some of them from Jerusalem said,
‘Is this not He whom they seek to kill?’” [25]**

In the opinion of the Jews Jerusalem was the source of spirituality and the true divine knowledge. However, the people in Jerusalem were confused because of the attitude of their religious leaders. Do they really seek to kill Him as one who blasphemes and deceives the people? Why then did they not arrest Him while He taught openly?

Here we see the conduct of the people coming from outside Jerusalem as different from that of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Those who came from outside did not know that the leaders were full of envy and hatred and opposed the LORD Christ. On the other hand, the dwellers in Jerusalem were aware of the plots of those leaders against

³⁹⁷ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 30:6.*

³⁹⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 30:7-8.*

Him.

Scholars distinguish three groups concerning the attitude of the Jews with regard to the LORD Christ (1) The rulers, priests, and Pharisees were full of hatred against the LORD Christ (2) The people of Jerusalem knew the feelings of the first group. They stood in confusion whether to submit to the leaders who at the same time did not take action to get rid of Him, or to enjoy His works of love, His signs, and His doctrine that has spiritual power of attraction because the LORD teaches with authority (3) The strangers who came to Jerusalem for the feast. They admired the LORD and knew nothing about the feelings of the first group against Him. They were astonished when they heard Him say they seek to kill Him [20]. They considered that a delusion he had or a demonic idea.

❖ We believe that the remaining Jewish people did not know the conspiracy of their rulers. But those in Jerusalem, who lived most of the time with the rulers and dwelt with them in the same city and met them continuously, knew their evil plots against Christ the Savior. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ Those who knew how violently they sought Him, were astonished at the power that protected Him from being arrested. And as they did not know His power as they should, they imagined that the rulers recognized Him as truly the Christ and therefore they let Him go though they eagerly sought to kill Him.³⁹⁹ Saint Augustine

**“But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him.
Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ?” [26]**

If the rulers did not know surely that this is truly the Christ what caused them to endure His bold reproof and His renewal of matters that were ordinances since old times. They found Him healing even on the Sabbath. Moreover, they were very much grieved when He frankly said, “Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law?” Yet they endured it all. Saint Cyril the Great

**“However, we know where this Man is from;
but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from.” [27]**

The majority of the people knew that Jesus was born in Bethlehem from the seed of David. However, according to Isaiah the prophet Who shall declare His generation?” (Is 53:8) That is to say His birth and appearance are a secret. The rabbis had this saying, “Three things happen suddenly: a thing we find unexpectedly, the sting of a scorpion, the appearance of the Messiah.” Therefore, the people of Jerusalem wondered whether Jesus was the Christ or not because they knew where He was from. They did not realize that what Isaiah said was about His great eternal birth and was also about His priesthood as He is according to the order of Melchizedek whose parents no one knows. But the prophets announced many details concerning His incarnation and the Jews knew where He was to be born (Matt 2:4-5).

❖ They did not comprehend the writings of the holy prophets about Him. These writings are in two divisions.
Sometimes the prophets indicate that He will come to the world in the flesh. They

³⁹⁹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:2.*

announce His birth in flesh of a virgin: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son” (Is 7:14). They even announce where He will be born: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” (Micah 5:2)

However, when they introduced, as much as possible, His incomprehensible birth of God the Father, they said, as mentioned before, “who shall declare His generation?” “For His life is taken from the earth.” Or concerning the quotation “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”, by His goings, he means the Only Begotten Son like glamour emanating from light. His special going forth from the Essence that gave birth to Him to His particular Self that is before all ages, all days and all moments. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ They say, “no one knows where He is from” in spite of the fact that when their rulers were asked they insisted He must be born in Bethlehem.

Once more, they say He will not come out of Galilee but from Bethlehem [41, 42]. Do you not see that their statements are said in anger? They say, “we know” and “we do not know”; for they are divided over one subject.⁴⁰⁰ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ As He is a Man, the Holy Scriptures had informed us what will occur to Him. But as He is God, this was hidden from the wicked people and needed the righteous to reveal it. Moreover, they say, “but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from” [27]. Isaiah who introduced the idea says this: “who shall declare His generation?” In short, the LORD Himself answered both: they know where He is from, and also they do not know. For He testifies to the prophet’s information concerning His weak humanity, and also concerning His divine glory.⁴⁰¹ Saint Augustine

**“Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying,
You both know Me, and you know where I am from;
And I have not come of Myself,
But He who sent Me is true,
Whom you do not know.” [28]**

The LORD Christ answered those questions openly. He cried out in the temple. He was probably calling the priests and rulers who did not dare to come nearer and did not bear to hear His voice. He called them so that they may approach and listen. He did not teach in secret, but openly because He presented the truth without deceit as they alleged. It is as though He said to them, “he, who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

“You both know Me, and you know where I am from” as though He says, ‘this is true; I am from your nation; I am related to you; you know where I was born. However, concerning My divinity you do not know Me, nor know where I am from. You do not know who sent Me.’

“And I have not come of Myself”: He is not a mere Man who works for His own sake. The Father sent Him and He works for the salvation of all humanity. He is the Son of God who had promised to send the Messiah, the Savior of the world. He is the divine promise realized, but they reject Him and His

⁴⁰⁰ Hom 50. PG 59:294.

⁴⁰¹ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:2.

Gospel.

It was not easy for the rulers to accept these words because they imply an accusation of ignorance on their part. They do not know God. He alone knows Him, not because God sent Him as He sent the prophets, but because Christ is “of Him” born everlasting of Him. Thus, on the one hand, He refers to their ignorance, and on the other hand, He manifests Himself as the Son born of the Father. This is, in their opinion, blasphemy that must be punished by death. However, a secret power prevents them from arresting Him until the hour does come.

❖ As a Man He did not come of Himself. As the Son of God He did not take His beginning from a human being. But, as He says, “Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning.” (John 8:25) The words I say to you are not of man, but are divine.⁴⁰²

❖ Then, what is the meaning of “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me” (John 12:44)? This means, ‘Do not believe what you perceive in the human form, nor in solely the man you see.’ For, as much as we must not believe in Him as just a man, we must believe that Jesus Christ Himself is God and Man at the same time. For these two reasons He says, “I have not come of Myself” (John 7:28). As a Man He has not come of Himself; and as the Son of God He did not take His beginning from man. He says, “Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning.” The words I say to you are not of man but are divine.⁴⁰³ Saint Ambrose

❖ The words, “you know where I am from” do not refer to a particular place, but His saying, “He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know” indicate the ignorance they reveal through their deeds. As the Apostle says, “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him” (Titus 1:16). Their error originates not only from ignorance, but also from wickedness, their evil thought and bad judgment. In spite of their knowledge, they desired to be ignorant. When they said, “we know where this Man is from”, they did not declare that He is from heaven. His answer, “you know where I am from” [28] means He is not from the place they assume, but from where He who sent Him.⁴⁰⁴

❖ His words, “I have not come of Myself” declare that they knew the Father sent Him, but still they did not want to avow it. He blames them on two counts: first that they spoke in secret, but He spoke openly to shame them and reveal their secret thoughts. Secondly, while they insist, “no one knows where He is from” He affirms that He Himself is the Christ.

They say, “no one knows” referring to distinctive local places. However with these same words He reveals Himself as the Christ because He has come from the Father. His words concerning the Father, “whom you do not know” aroused their anger. He rebuked them because, as He knew their pretence of ignorance, His reproof was enough to dishonor them.⁴⁰⁵ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ The Scriptures, God’s inspiration, have granted you to know Me and to know where I am from. That you know I am from Nazareth or Bethlehem, and that I am

⁴⁰² *On the Christian Faith, Book 5:10:120.*

⁴⁰³ *On the Christian Faith, 5:10:120.*

⁴⁰⁴ *Hom 50. PG 59:294-295.*

⁴⁰⁵ *Hom 50. PG 59:295.*

born of a woman does not excuse you to have no faith. But, because of these things that were said about Me and because of My birth in flesh, you should rather have advanced in understanding the mysteries concerning Me, rather than echoing a single word of a prophet who spoke about My incomprehensible birth from God the Father.

❖ I am not like you. I shall not imitate your despicable behavior against Me. For, I have not come of Myself. I do not yield to natural impulse as you do. I have come from heaven and He who sent Me is true. He is not like the devil who sent you, Satan the liar whose spirit you received and you dared to tell lies about the prophecies. Satan stirred you up to invent words and say they are God's words. For the devil is not true; he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Saint Cyril the Great

❖ As though He says, 'you know Me, and you know where I am from. But you do not know where I am from... You know where I, Jesus the Nazarene, am from; you know. You know His parents because His birth of a perpetual virgin was concealed from you. The virgin's husband acknowledges this, for he can testify honestly as a jealous husband that that was the expected virginal birth.

They knew the facts concerning Jesus as a man. They knew His face, city, and family. If they inquired, they would know where He was born. In truth, He said, "you both know Me, and you know where I am from" [28], but this that you know concerns my human form.

As for His divinity, He says, "I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know." [28] You could have known Him and believed Him who sent Me. "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." (John 1:18) "Nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." (Matt 11:27). Saint Augustine

❖ "Whom you do not know" since you do not know Him who is of Him and in whom alone the Father is declared. For, he who has seen the Son has seen the Father (John 14:9) and he who knows the Son does not ignore Him who begot Him.

He is not like them who do not know His Father. He affirms that He knows Himself and knows Him (the Father) very well indeed. For, He is God from God the Father and has a special, wonderful, and strange knowledge of all those things as befits Him alone. For, the Son does not know the Father in the same way we know Him. The nature of creatures reaches the conception of God through understanding only and does not exceed its appropriate limits. It unwillingly submits to the divine nature combined in the inexpressible words. But, the only begotten Son of God the Father who begot Him perfectly in Himself, depicts the essence of the Father in Himself and knows Him in an inexpressible sense because things concerning God cannot be expressed. Saint Cyril the Great

**"But I know Him, for I am from Him,
and He sent Me." [29]**

❖ Why does He say, "I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me" [29]? He declares both in a glorious manner. He says, "I am from Him" because the Son is from the Father, and the Son is as Him from whom He is the Son. We, therefore, say that the LORD Jesus Christ is God from God. We do not say about the Father that He is God from God, but that He is God. We say about the LORD Jesus, light from light.

We do not say about the Father that He is light from light, but that He is the light. This is why He says, “I am from Him.”

But depending on your beholding Me in the flesh “He sent Me.”

When you hear “He sent Me” do not think that there is a difference in essence, but only in the authority of Him who begot.⁴⁰⁶ Saint Augustine

Saint John Chrysostom comments on the wonderful meekness of the LORD Christ through which He won many souls to belief in Him.

❖ Do you not see how He always desired to prove by this: “I have not come of Myself” “He who sent Me is true” that He endeavored not to be considered an enemy of God? Notice the great benefit of His humble words, for it was later said “When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?”⁴⁰⁷ Saint John Chrysostom

**“Therefore they sought to take Him;
but no one laid a hand on Him,
because His hour had not yet come.” [30]**

❖ The Lord’s rebuke silenced the Pharisees. And when they were sure that their silence concerning these things harmed their obduracy and benefited the multitude (for they were convinced He was the Christ) they thirsted again for His murder and put their reverence of the law aside. They were then counted as unworthy to remember the commandment “the innocent and righteous slay thou not” (exodus 23:7). However, the divine act restrained them, controlled their evil action and changed their plots into mere attempts. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ “Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come” that is to say, because He did not will that. For, what is the meaning of these words, “His hour had not yet come”? The LORD was not born subject to a particular destiny. You must not believe this concerning yourself: (that you are destined. All the more reason that you do not think that about your Creator.) If your hour obeys His good will (and is not by fate) how much more appropriate it is that His hour will not come except in accordance to His good will? The word “the hour” does not mean the hour when He will die unwillingly, but rather means the hour when He willingly condescends to die. He waited for the hour when He dies just as He waited for the hour when He was born. The Apostle spoke about that saying, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son born.. (Gal 4:4). For this reason, many ask why did not Christ come before? The answer is, because the fullness of the time had not yet come. In the first place it was necessary to announce His coming throughout many years and eras because His coming is not a trivial event. The foretelling for a long time of Him to whom we adhere eternally was requisite.

The greater the eminence of the judge the longer is the line of his forerunners who announce his coming.

In short, when the fullness of the time had come He who saved us from time came. When we are saved from time we reach eternity where there is no time. Then we shall not say, ‘when will the hour come?’ because the eternal day is not preceded by yesterday, nor is it cut short by tomorrow. But in this world the days recur one after

⁴⁰⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:4.*

⁴⁰⁷ *Homilies on St. John 50:2.*

the other; days pass and days come and no day is everlasting. During the moments we are speaking one moment drags another, each moment in turn.

Since we began speaking we have become older, for certainly I am now older than when I was in the morning. Likewise, nothing remains without change; nothing is stable in time. Therefore, we should love Him through whom time was made, for when we love Him we are free from time and abide in the everlasting where there is no change in time.

The blessings of our LORD Jesus Christ are great. For our sake He existed in time, He who made time. He existed among all things, He who through whom all things were made and He became that which He created.

He became Man He who created man so that the things He created may not perish. We consider this provision happened the hour He was born. However, at that time the hour of His suffering had not yet come. He therefore had not yet suffered.⁴⁰⁸ Saint Augustine

“And many of the people believed in Him, and said, ‘When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?’” [31]

The more the anguish of the rulers and their attempts at killing the LORD Christ and subduing the public, the more did the truth become clear. Therefore, many of the people believed in Him.

The rulers detected unbearable blasphemy in the overt speech of the LORD Christ. Yet, many of the people perceived in His acts of extreme love a sure proof that He was the Promised Messiah, for it was impossible that anyone could do signs similar to those of the LORD Christ. The LORD indeed said that He came for the rising of many, and also for the fall of many.

❖ As I often repeat the worldly are convinced not by the teachings or by preaching, but by miracles.⁴⁰⁹ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ They always labored to show that He was not the Christ. But, if we consider that He is not the Christ, will the Christ be better than Him? Saint John Chrysostom

❖ The LORD healed the humble and the poor. The leaders were in rage and they for this reason only did not know the Physician and even sought to kill Him. There were many people who quickly saw their sickness and without delay knew their cure. Behold how the multitudes were stirred by His miracles and so believed in Him.⁴¹⁰ Saint Augustine

“The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him.” [32]

Many of the people began to believe in Him and there was murmuring among the crowd. The rulers felt that any delay was not in their interest. They, therefore, sent officers (of the temple) to arrest Him.

⁴⁰⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:5.*

⁴⁰⁹ *Homilies on St. John 50:2.*

⁴¹⁰ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:7.*

❖ The people accused them truly that they were more defeated by their envy than by an interest in the deliverance of the people. And it seems that the crowd wronged them, and became more thirsty for belief in Him.

❖ It was more suitable for the chief priests to be leaders in good judgment and have control over the direction of advice that does not oppose God. But as they were far from any good course and had thrown the divine law behind their personal lives, they were swept away by the satisfaction of their stupid agitation only. That is because it is written the head has become the tail (Deut 218:44) for the leader has become a follower and by agreement with the perverse Pharisees, has given vent to his attacks against Christ also. Saint Cyril the Great

**“Then Jesus said to them,
‘I shall be with you a little while longer,
and then I go to Him who sent Me.’ [33]**

Here He speaks to the people, not to the officers. He shows that He knows all about the secret plots of the rulers against Him, though they yet failed to practically fulfill their aim.

❖ Tell Me why you are so angry as though I shall stay with you a long time in this world. I confess I am a heavy burden for you. I do not bring much joy to those who do not honor virtue. But do not lay death snares for Me before it is time. “I shall be with you a little while longer” and I shall go joyfully when the right hour for My suffering comes. I shall depart as God from among the wicked, but I shall remain with My people all the time even though it will seem I am absent in the flesh.

Why do you torture yourselves with fruitless counsel?

Sheathe your envy weapon, for you point it at no aim.

Life will not submit to death; corruption will do no harm to incorruption.

The gates of Hades will not confine Me and I shall not become a dead body in your graves. I shall rise up high to Him from whom I am.

I shall ascend again to heaven seen by the people and the angels together as a judge of your blasphemy.

Human beings will wonder at My ascension and when the angels meet Me they will say, “What are these wounds in Your hands? Then I shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends.” (Zech 13:6). Saint Cyril the Great

❖ I need to complete My provision through that My suffering may be executed.⁴¹¹
Saint Augustine

**“You will seek Me and not find Me,
and where I am you cannot come.” [34]**

Some liken the LORD Christ’s words to the pillar of a cloud and the pillar of fire that appeared to the people of Israel in the wilderness. For, Christ’s words are, on the one hand, radiant and joyful, but, on the other hand, they are dark.

The joyful aspect is in that the LORD Christ walked in this world a little while, to cross over to the valley of pain then ascend to the Father. It is a world full of hardship

⁴¹¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:8.*

that He traveled every day carrying the cross, but this will not last long. Our days are full of trouble; we must endure the thorns and overstep the obstacles and barriers, but we thank God, these are few! Pain will not travel with us to Paradise!

He says, "I go" and so affirms that He willingly, and not against His will, accepts death. He chose this difficult journey as the ambassador of the Father. He offered His life to be a sacrifice for the sake of the world, and then returned to the Father. The uprising of the rulers against Him and their opposition had no power without His permission. At the same time, His heart burned as a Son of Man to go to the Father.

As for the dark side, it concerns the rulers who have so much envy and hatred that they hurry to remove Him from all the earth. However, they do not realize that they seek Him and do not find Him. They obtain the consequence of their ingratitude towards Him. They drink of the cup of their sins when they cannot know and reach Him.

Some writers say that here He speaks about the event when the Romans led by Titus will invade Jerusalem. The Jews will then cry for a savior like Ahab when he sought Elijah and searched for him, but could not find him (1 Kings 18:10).

He may mean that they will, on the Day of Judgment, discover that they opposed the truth. They will seek to participate in the glory with the Messiah, but they will not find Him because the way of repentance will have been closed and everyone will receive according to his deeds. They expect to be saved and rejoice in heaven, but they will find that He whom they resisted is the heavenly judge of humanity and that they are not fit to enter heaven, for they refused the cross, the tree of life.

❖ The blessed Paul writes in truth, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor 6:2) And again, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all" (Gal 6:10). For, when we lose the opportunity, we lose what it brought. We must not sleep when the blessings are there; we must rather be vigilant and strive wisely to obtain what is profitable, not when the search is futile.

❖ Let then the spiritual Paul call with a loud voice those who died to sin, saying, "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." (Col 3:3-4) In his sermon about the resurrection he also writes, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the LORD in the air. And thus we shall always be with the LORD." (1 Thess 4:17)

Yes. As when the thief, who was hanged with Him and was at the very point of death, believed in Him, he took hold of the grace of the saints. For, Christ said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)

Thus, those who honor Him with obedience will be with Him with no hindrance. They will rejoice because of the blessings that surpass understanding. But those who do not desist from offending Him with their stupidity although they are sons of the wedding, they will be cast out in the abyss of grief to receive bitter punishment. As it is written, they "will be cast out into outer darkness" (Matt 8:12). Saint Cyril the Great

❖ Here He, beforehand, tells them about His resurrection. When He was present, they did not know Him. But later they will seek Him when they discover that the multitudes had believed in Him.

Wonderful signs will happen when the LORD rises and ascends to heaven. His

disciples will achieve great deeds. He will work through them as He personally worked. For, He said to them, “without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

When the lame man who sat at the gate walked after he heard Peter’s voice, the people were filled with wonder. Then Peter spoke to them saying that it was not by his own power that he made the man walk, but through Him whom they killed (Acts 3:16). Many were pricked in their hearts and asked, “what should we do?” when they perceived that they were involved in a horrible crime when they killed Him whom they should honor and worship.⁴¹²

❖ He did not say, ‘where I shall be’, but said, “where I am [34] because Christ has always been in that place when He was on His way back. He came in a manner through which He did not leave that place (heaven). “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.” (John 3:13) He did not say He was in heaven. He spoke while He was on earth and said that at that time He was in heaven.⁴¹³

❖ He did not say, ‘you will not be able to come’, but He said, “you cannot come” [34] because at that time they were not able for that. And, so that they may know that He did not say this to cause them to lose hope, He said to His disciples, “where I am going, you cannot come” (John 13:33). Yet, in His prayer for them He said, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am” (John 17:24). He explained to Peter saying, “where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward” (John 13:36).⁴¹⁴ Saint Augustine

❖ Even in this present life, a soldier who disrespects his king cannot see the king, but is dismissed from his position, and is punished cruelly. Therefore, if we steal, are greedy, or offend others, if we do not practice deeds of mercy, we cannot go there. We shall then suffer the experience of the foolish virgins who could not enter. They were lazy, their lamps were extinguished, that is to say, grace left them.⁴¹⁵ Saint John Chrysostom

“Then the Jews said among themselves,
‘Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him?
Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?’” [35]

They thought that He spoke about leaving Judea and going to the Dispersion in the world to preach the Jews who were in many countries having Greek culture and using the Greek Septuagint. The Jews in Judea wanted to clean the Jews from Hellenic (Greek) thought. They thought He intended to go to the pagan nations to preach to them.

❖ What is “the Dispersion among the Greeks”? This is what the Jews called the Gentiles because the Jews were dispersed in all places and were intermixed with the others without satiation. This shame caused them to fall later and they became scattered. After saying this, they noticed that they did not say that He will go to destroy them, but they said, He will go to “teach” them. To this degree they dropped

⁴¹² St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:9.*

⁴¹³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:9.*

⁴¹⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:4.*

⁴¹⁵ *Homilies on St. John 50:3.*

their anger.⁴¹⁶ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ Indeed, the LORD was going to the Gentiles (the Greeks) not in His personal presence, but on His feet. What are those two feet? Those are the two feet that Saul wanted to trample on by persecuting Christians. Then the Head cried to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4)⁴¹⁷

❖ This that the LORD speaks about saying that they do not know the place – if it is right to call it a place – is in the bosom of the Father. Christ never left it, and they were not qualified to comprehend where Christ was from where He will never withdraw. For where He goes He has always been.

How can the human heart understand this?

And even more how can the human tongue explain it?

They never understood that and yet they foretold our salvation by saying that the LORD will go to the Dispersion among the Gentiles. They accomplished what they read, but did not understand: “A people I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me they obey me” (Ps 18:43) Those who were in front of His eyes did not listen to Him, but His voice rang in the ears of those who heard of Him.⁴¹⁸ Saint Augustine

**“What is this thing that He said,
‘You will seek Me and not find Me,
and where I am you cannot come?’” [36]**

❖ They do not say, ‘He will ascend to heaven’ even though they heard Him say clearly, “I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me.” [33] But they imagined a city of the Greeks as if the Father sent Him among them.

They are like those who prophesy and do not know what they say. Some divine force drove them and caused them, in their doubt, to introduce Christ into a Gentile city and think that this might happen after a little while.

In saying this they offend Him with disgrace as though He had transgressed the law; as though He broke the divine commandments and disregarded all things. Saint Cyril the Great

6 – The Promise of Pentecost

**“On the last day, that great day of the feast,
Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and
drink.’” [37]**

Those who attached themselves to Moses the prophet, drank water from the rock in the wilderness. The rock followed them and overflowed with water to quench their thirst. But he who believes in the LORD Christ carries the Rock inside himself and the flood springs not from the outside, but inside him, in his inner self where the kingdom of God is.

⁴¹⁶ Hom 50.

⁴¹⁷ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:10.*

⁴¹⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:10.*

The Jews call the running water, living water, because it moves all the time and does not stop. Likewise, when the LORD Christ is in the heart, the believer enjoys many blessings and those blessings inundate those who surround him (Prov 10:11). We do not only drink of the spring inside us and rest in the divine grace given to us, but we must also let this inner well overflow to quench the thirst of many. Thus, the dry, barren earth changes into a Paradise and its water overflows the dry, barren spirits to share its new paradisiacal nature.

On the last day of the feast, the LORD Christ stood to offer a call to the people about to return to their homes. He offered His invitation openly crying out. During the first days of the feast they offer sacrifices for the seventy nations in the world. However, the last day is devoted for Israel alone. Therefore, the eighth day was considered “great” and had its special importance.

❖ He does not say, ‘You must drink, you must run whether you like or not.’ He rather says, ‘Let whoever wishes and is able, run and drink, for he will overcome and drink.’⁴¹⁹ Saint Jerome

❖ It is not an insignificant matter that we read that a river proceeds from the throne of God. The Evangelist John writes, “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” (Rev 22:1-2) This is certainly the river proceeding from the throne of God, that is to say, the Holy Spirit that who believes in Christ drinks as Christ Himself said [37-38].⁴²⁰ Saint Ambrose

❖ In conclusion, a man must either take everything from the river or the valley, or he perishes. We, therefore, say that our LORD Jesus Christ is compared to the river; in Him we find all joy and comfort in hope; in Him we rejoice in spiritual bliss. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ If we are thirsty, let us come not on foot, but by means of our emotions. Let us come, not by moving from our place, but by love. Although in accordance to my inner self I like also to move from one place to another, yet whoever changes his place physically, does so because he is motivated by his heart. If you now like something and previously you liked something else, you are now not at the same place where you were.⁴²¹ Saint Augustine

❖ Even though the soul is united with God, yet it does not feel fully and absolutely happy. The more it enjoys His beauty, the more it yearns for Him. The words of the Bridegroom are Spirit and Life (John 5:24). All those who adhere to the Spirit become spirits. All those who adhere to Life pass from death into life as the LORD said. Thus, the virgin spirit always aspires to grow through the spring of spiritual life. The spring is the mouth of the Bridegroom, from it emerge the words of everlasting life. He fills the mouth that approaches Him, as David the prophet said that he opened his mouth and received the Spirit (Ps 119:131). In order that he may drink, it is necessary

⁴¹⁹ *Against Jovinianus, 1:12.*

⁴²⁰ *Of the Holy Spirit, Book 3:20:153-154.*

⁴²¹ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 32:2.*

for the person to put his mouth on the mouth of the spring. The LORD Himself is the spring as He says, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37). Therefore, the thirsty souls wish to put their mouths on the mouth that gives life and say, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” (Song of Solomon 1:2). He who grants life to all and desires all men to be saved yearns for everyone to enjoy a share of these kisses that purify from all filth.⁴²²

❖ We need to meditate well on the holy words in the Song: “Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions’ dens, from the mountains of the leopards.” (Song of Solomon 4:8)

What do these words mean?

The Spring of grace attracts all those who are thirsty, as the Spring says in the Gospel, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37).

In these words, Christ does not set any limit for our thirst and our movement towards Him. Nor does He limit our thirst quenching. His command extends to all times and urges us to thirst and go to Him. Those who tasted and saw, through trial, that God is great and good (Ps 34:8) have a sense of taste that impels them to approach more. Therefore, the person who walks continuously towards God does not lack this incentive to advance.⁴²³

❖ If we wish to quote a greater evidence from the Holy Bible, we point out the words of the LORD Christ to those who believe in Him, that rivers of living water will flow out of anyone who believes in Him. He says, “He who believes in Me ... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:38) Add to this that the pure hearts are referred to as showing the work of law written in them (Rom 2:15). The Apostle explains that the Law is written in the heart. It is written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God (2 Cor 3:3). God draws these letters in the spirit, not on tablets of stone – so says the Apostle – but on the tablet of the pure heart, the light and luminous.

It is necessary to trace the holy words that are in the pure, clear memory, over the leading force of the spirit, in distinct relief. The breath, indeed, refers to the glorification of the Bridegroom’s heart only, the tablet that emits light the color of the sky.

This image guides us so that we may be aware of the heavenly things, where our treasure is (Matt 6:21). If we keep God’s commandments steadfastly, sacred hopes will be created for us to invigorate our spiritual eyes.⁴²⁴

❖ After that, the Song raises the Bride to the highest glory with the additional name that she is a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon. The Holy Bible teaches us that the nature of God is to grant life. This is expressed in a prophecy by a man of God that says, “they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters” (Jer 2:13). Then, the LORD Christ says to the Samaritan woman, “Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.’” (John 4:10) The LORD said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He

⁴²² *Song of Solomon by Saint Gregory of Syssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, 1993; sermon 1.*

⁴²³ *Ibid., sermon 8.*

⁴²⁴ *Ibid., sermon 14.*

spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive.” (John 7:37-39)

All these statements indicate that the living water is the holy nature. It is permissible, therefore, that the Song says truly of the Bride that she is a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon. This, indeed, contradicts the known fact that all wells contain stagnant water. However, the Bride alone has running water in a deep well and this water overflows continuously.

Who is able and worthy to understand the wonders granted to the Bride? It is clear that she reached her utmost wishes. For, she is compared to the eternal beauty, from which all beauty originates. Her fountain is exactly similar to her Bridegroom’s fountain; her life is like his, her water is his. His word is a living word and by it lives every spirit that receives it.

This water flows out of God as the Spring of living waters says, “for I proceeded forth and came from God” (John 8:42).

The Bride keeps the flow of living water in the well of her spirit. She becomes a dwelling that treasures this living water that flows from Lebanon, that is to say, that forms the streams from Lebanon, as the text says.

We have become in communion with God by possessing this well in order that we may achieve Wisdom’s commandment (Prov 5:15, 17) and drink waters out of our own well and not the well of a stranger. We enjoy that in Christ our LORD to whom is glory and majesty forever. Amen.⁴²⁵ Saint Gregory of Nyssa

The Psalm refers to God as a river that flows with His blessing to quench the thirst of the human race (Ps 36:7-8). He will extend peace and glory to the Gentiles (Is 66:12 LXX).

“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” [38]

Who believes in Me and accepts Me as the Messiah about whom the Scriptures prophesied, the Holy Spirit dwells in his heart and overflows with life. He becomes a spring that has abundance of the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, freedom, and enlightenment. The Jews were used to liken the work of the Holy Spirit to the ‘former’ and the ‘latter’ rain and to the fountains, wells and rivers and so on (Ps 36:8-9; Is 44:3-4; Joel 2:23).

When He says, “If anyone thirsts”, He means, if anyone senses his want of righteousness, his need for the spiritual blessings, or his inner emptiness.

“Let him come to Me and drink.” Let him not stand before the chief priest and admire the golden vessel from which he pours a little water from the pool of Siloam. Let him not go to many contradictory pagan philosophies that attract and deceive men. Let him rather come to the LORD Christ as the Holy Bible presents to us in both Testaments.

❖ The reward of faith is great and endless. The believer says that he enjoys the richest blessings of God. For, he will be filled with the gifts of the Spirit that will not only enrich his mind, but will also be able to overflow in the hearts of others like a running river that abounds with bliss granted by God to his neighbor also. Saint Cyril the Great

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*; sermon 9.

❖ There is inner thirst, and there is inner heart, for there is inner self. This inner self is truly invisible, but the outer man is visible. However, the inner is better than the outer. The invisible is more loved, for, certainly, the inner man is more loved than the outer man.⁴²⁶

❖ What does the fountain mean, and what is the river that flows out of the heart of the inner man? This is the inclination to be charitable and to care for one's brother. If he imagines that his drink must satisfy him alone, there will be no living water flowing out of his heart. But, if he hastens to care for his brother, he will not be dry, but will rather overflow.⁴²⁷ Saint Augustine

❖ The heart...where, in the Holy Bible, do we find these words, that 'out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'? Nowhere.

What, then is the meaning of "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said"? Here, we must stop, for the statement "out of his heart will flow rivers" may be an assertion about Christ. Many said, "this is truly the Christ." They said, "When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these?" He reveals the need for true knowledge, and that they must not be content with the miracles, but with the Scripture.

He previously said, "search the Scriptures" (5:39) and also, "It is written in the prophets" and "they shall all be taught by God" (6:45). He said, "Moses accuses you" (5:45) and here He says, "as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers" hinting at the greatness of the grace and its overflow. In another place He calls it "everlasting life", but here He calls it "rivers of living water."

For, when the grace of the Spirit enters and dwells in the mind, it overflows more than any fountain.

It will neither stop nor waste away.

He calls it "a well" and "rivers", so that we may understand that it gives unending help and that at the same time it is an unfailing energy. It is not one river, but numerous, countless rivers.

It is possible for a person to understand clearly what this means if he takes into consideration the wisdom of Stephen, the eloquence of Peter, and the zeal of Paul.⁴²⁸ Saint John Chrysostom

❖ Thus, the LORD commands the prophet to cross the river (1 Kings 17:2) so that he may drink of the New Covenant, not only of one river, but "out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" [38]. These are rivers of understanding, rivers of meditation, spiritual rivers that will dry up at times of disbelief, lest those who defile sacred things, and the non-believers drink of them. At that place, the ravens knew what the Jews did not know. The ravens brought him food, while the royal, honorable people persecuted him.⁴²⁹ Saint Ambrose

"But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." [39]

⁴²⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 32:2.*

⁴²⁷ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 32:4.*

⁴²⁸ *Hom 51. PG 59:300-301.*

⁴²⁹ *Letter, 63:78-79.*

God does not withhold His Spirit from the human race. He created man so that the Spirit of God works and dwells in him. But man turned his back willingly and did not accept Him. The Spirit then became a guest working in the men of God and in prophets, and even sometimes, in non-believers to attract them to faith. However, when the LORD was glorified on the Cross, He paid the price for the forgiveness of our sins and our glorification in Him. He granted us the Spirit in abundance as He had promised in Joel 2:28.

The Holy Spirit is the greatest gift; He is the giver of gifts. We received a promise of His coming to the Church and His dwelling in the heart of the believer. He will distribute the talents and gifts as He wills, for the glory of God, the growth of the Church, and the redemption of the spirits.

Saint Augustine opines that the Holy Spirit descended on many before Jesus was glorified with His resurrection. Examples are Simeon the Elder, Anna the prophetess, and Saint Mary at the Incarnation. However, the descent of the Holy Spirit after the Resurrection, was general on the Church on Pentecost when all the Gentile languages were spoken. But why does not the believer obtain the gift of speaking in Gentile languages when he is baptized now and receives the Holy Spirit?

Saint Augustine answers this question saying that as the Church spread over the world, Christians spoke all the languages of the world. Every Christian, as a member of the universal Church, considers himself as one who speaks all the languages of nations, because the languages of his brethren are considered his language, for he and they are members in one body.⁴³⁰

Once more, Saint Augustine says that after Christ's resurrection, Christ granted us the Holy Spirit through whom we love the Church and enjoy her love and unity. We enjoy the resurrection with Him when with our hearts we leave the world and live with Him in heaven. "We have the Holy Spirit if we love the Church. But we love the Church if we abide in her unity and love. Here, we are born and die. Would we do not love the world, but leave it with love and with love dwell in the highest with the same love that God loves us. In this life journey would we do not think of anything but that we remain here and that with good life we prepare for ourselves a place that we never leave."⁴³¹

If the Holy Spirit was not yet given, how did the prophets of the Old Testament perform miracles? Was not that the work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them? Again, how did the Lord's disciples practice miracles before the Holy Spirit descended on them? Saint John Chrysostom answers this question saying, "They cast out demons not with the Spirit, but some of them did that through the power given them."

"He sent them": the Evangelist does not say, 'He gave them the Holy Spirit', but says, "He gave them power" (Matt 10:1) to cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons in the same manner as the prophets. In the case of the prophets they all confess that this is the gift of the Holy Spirit. But this gift was limited and would depart and was incomplete on earth. The Holy Spirit was preserved for particular individuals. "But the future overflows."⁴³²

❖ The Cross is called "glory." It was necessary to offer the Sacrifice for us first to remove the hostility that is in our body, in order that we may become friends of God and then accept the Gift.⁴³³ Saint John Chrysostom

⁴³⁰ St. Augustine: *ON the Gospel of St. John, tractate 32:7.*

⁴³¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 32:8-9.*

⁴³² *Hom 51: PG 59:300-301.*

⁴³³ *Hom 51: PG 59:301.*

❖ The Holy Spirit is the river that flows – according to the Hebrews – from Christ to the earth. We have accepted that, as Isaiah prophesied (Is 66:12). This great river that will always overflow and never stop is not only a river, but is also one of the abundant currents that overflow greatness as David says, "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God" (Ps 46:4). Thus the irrigation of that city, the heavenly Jerusalem, is not by an earthly river, but by this Holy Spirit who proceeds from God, the source of life. That stream that proceeds from the One who satisfies us seems to overflow abundantly among the heavenly thrones, potentates, and powers, and among the angels and archangels, running in the complete share of the seven spiritual virtues.⁴³⁴ Saint Ambrose

❖ God the Father began to give the Spirit again. Christ was the first to accept the Spirit as the First One in the renewed nature. For, John testified saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven ...and He remained upon Him." (John 1:32)

Christ did not accept the Spirit for Himself, but rather for us in Him. For, all good things overflow also in us through Him.

For, when our grandfather, Adam, digressed through deceit, he fell into rebellion and sin, and he did not keep the blessing of the Spirit. Thus, in Adam, the human nature lost all the good that God gave it. It was necessary, therefore, that God, the Unchangeable, should become a Man in order that the goodness He obtains as Man He keeps in our nature forever. Our guide in the interpretation of these mysteries is the godly Psalmist himself. He says to the Son, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions." (Ps 45:7).

❖ There is a rich, special glamour in the holy prophets. They get it from the source of enlightenment, that is the Holy Spirit who can guide them to understand forthcoming things and know terrible news. But we are confident that those who believe in Christ do not only obtain enlightenment through the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit Himself dwells and makes His home in them. Let us comprehend that He means the residence of the Holy Spirit in human beings is perfect. Saint Cyril the Great

**"Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said,
'Truly this is the Prophet.'" [40]**

Some said that He is the great Prophet about whom Moses the prophet spoke (Deut 18:15). However, unfortunately, they could not understand that the Prophet meant the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Others said He was the Christ.

**"Others said,
'This is the Christ.'
But some said, 'Will the Christ come out of Galilee?'" [41]**

The Old Testament prophesied that the Christ would come of the tribe of Judah from the line of David. Therefore, some doubted, as they did not know that He was born in Bethlehem, but thought that He was born in Galilee.

Saint Cyril the Great says that the crowds, like the Pharisees, lacked accuracy in this

⁴³⁴ *Of the Holy Spirit 1:16:177-178.*

matter. They thought that the Prophet that God promised to Moses He will raise up from among his brethren, like Moses (Deut 18:18) was a different person from the Christ. Because of their lack of accuracy, the Pharisees thought that three persons would appear. For, they say to Saint John the Baptist, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” (John 1:25)

“Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?” [42]

The Jews knew that the LORD Christ would come from the seed of David (Ps 132:11) and would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). But, as Saint Cyril the Great says, the Jews fell into error and needed right thinking because it was rumored that Jesus was brought up in Nazareth (Luke 4:16).

“So there was a division among the people because of Him.” [43]

+ Because of their division they did not know the Christ. They did not understand the accuracy of the Scripture. For, if they believed that Jesus was the Prophet mentioned in the Law, they would not have fallen into this unbecoming discussion. Saint Cyril the Great

“Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him.” [44]

The result is that there was a division among the crowd. There were four groups. One group believed He was the Prophet, but not the Christ. Another group believed He was the Christ. A third group could see in Him signs of the Christ, but they stumbled because they thought He was from Galilee. The fourth group followed the rulers and wanted to take Him, but could not.

❖ No one laid hands on Him, not because they honored Him, but because only His power stopped them. Saint Cyril the Great

“Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, ‘Why have you not brought Him?’” [45]

Although this was the last great day of the feast, yet they could not be happy because they deprived themselves of the LORD Christ, the source of joy.

The chief priest performed the feast ritual. Yet he, the priests, and Pharisees were not preoccupied with helping the people to enjoy God’s love and understand the mystery of the feast, but they instead distracted the people with appearances while the rulers conspired. In their opinion, church politics were more important than the spiritual work. They sat in the special meeting room waiting for the arrival of the officers of the temple with Jesus in fetters.

As they sent the officers of the temple to arrest Him, they were terrified when they saw the officers coming back without Him. They were astonished when the officers returned without Him and they may have thought that He, as usual in such cases, had hidden until the hour would come.

**“The officers answered,
‘No man ever spoke like this Man.’” [46]**

They did not expect that the officers of the temple themselves would be attracted to Him and testify boldly before the multitude that “No man ever spoke like this Man.” The officers may have followed the LORD since He came about the middle of the feast. They listened attentively to Him to find a reason for arresting Him. But, the more they listened, the more they were convinced that He was righteous and full of heavenly wisdom.

The rulers told them that He was a false prophet and deceiver. But when they heard Him, they adhered to Him and realized that He taught the truth, all the truth, and nothing but the truth.

❖ We may assume that the words of the officers were full of reason. They reasoned as follows. We are satisfied with the teaching of the Scripture. We boast that we are learned in the divine Law, and we admire wisdom as goodness not from this earth. Why, then, do we wickedly expel Him who has wisdom and, in great misconception, disgrace Him whom we should not accuse, but to whom we owe special love? Yes. We submit to the Law, and yet we are eager to kill an innocent and righteous man (Ex 23:7) without cause.

Concerning the statement, “No man ever spoke like this Man” I believe that one can say about this something to this effect. They probably meant to say, ‘it is unreasonable to blame us because we have not brought to you now whom you want. For, how can a person resist, even against his will, a Man whose words are those of a god.

He does not speak like a human being, His words are not those of a human being; they are those that rightly belong to one who has God’s nature.

Let anyone say if any holy prophet can call himself a river or dare to say, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.” When did the great Moses say to us, “He who believes in Me out of his heart will flow rivers of living waters”? How can we take Him against His will, He who is above us immeasurably, as God is above men?

This is how the officers gave a clear proof that the LORD is God in essence. This is how they attacked on every side those who resisted God. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ Here are the chief priests and the Pharisees who thought that they had more wisdom than others. They came to the Christ and saw His wonders; they read the Scripture, but nothing profited them. They were blind.

But their officers heard with the multitude one speech of the LORD Christ and that speech trapped them. They went to Him to arrest Him, but they returned bound and amazed at Him.

We admire their understanding, for they did not need signs, but only His doctrine to lure them.

They did not say that no human being ever did such wonders like Him. They said, “No man ever spoke like this Man.” We, therefore, must not marvel at their understanding, we must rather be surprised at their boldness because they said that to the Pharisees who had sent them.

Their words are not the words of those who merely admire Him, but they also blame their masters because they oppose without listening. Although they did not hear a sermon, but only a brief talk, they were convinced. When a person hears a long

sermon his mind decides impartially and does not need a long discussion.⁴³⁵ Saint John Chrysostom

**“Then the Pharisees answered them,
‘Are you also deceived?’ [47]**

No wonder that since its beginnings and until now, some think that Christianity deceives. Whoever accepts it is deceived.

❖ See how this answer is full of some kind of despair. They have no hope for the people. What has hindered your love for us, though you grew out of the same lack of belief as we did! Saint Cyril the Great

“Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?” [48]

For them, the criterion for truth is that a large number of the rulers accept Him. For, though many among the populace believe in Him, the rulers still think that if only a few of them believe in Him, this proves that He is a deceiver and has no truth in Him.⁴³⁶

7 – The Testimony of the Officers of the Altar for Him

“But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” [49]

The Pharisees despised the people. They did not regard the people’s belief in the LORD Christ as important, but they thought the people did not understand the law and were, therefore, accursed.

The religious leaders at that time, even though they were in conflict among themselves, they still agreed in considering the people uneducated and so scorned and despised them. Instead of blaming themselves for neglecting to care and teach the people, they said the people were accursed. They blamed the people for their ignorance, instead of blaming themselves for failing in their task as teachers.

❖ The Pharisees fell as usual in the sin of bragging. They accused of ignorance those who admired Jesus for His wonders and for doing divine deeds. They crowned themselves alone with service in accordance to the law and with knowledge of the Scriptures. They admired themselves much and they became thoughtless. In their extreme contempt they easily described the people as ignorant. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ O Pharisees, you bear the blame, for the multitudes believed in the LORD Christ, but you denied Him. They acted as those who know the law. How, then, may they be accursed? Truly, you are accursed because you did not observe the law. Saint John Chrysostom

**“Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them {50}
‘Does our law judge a man before it hears him
and knows what he is doing?’” [51]**

⁴³⁵ *Homilies on St. John 52:1.*

⁴³⁶ *68 Homilies on St. John 52:1.*

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and one of the rulers of the Jews. God, thus, was not without witness even among the corrupt Sanhedrim. God's witness in Nebuchadnezzar's palace was the prophet Daniel; in Artaxerxes's palace Nehemiah was God's witness, and God found Hushai among Absalom's wicked advisers and used him to change their evil counsel into foolishness.

Nicodemus objected to the false steps they took against Jesus. He said that they acted against the law.

❖ Nicodemus exposed them as ignorant of the Law. They neither knew nor observed the law. For, the law does not decree the murder of a man before his judges hear him. Yet, these hurry to kill Him before they hear Him. Therefore, they disobey the Law. Saint John Chrysostom

❖ He was somewhat alarmed because he considered himself accursed along with the others. For, a man's conscience hastens not to be silent when faced with things he opposes. He diverted the very insult to them, not frankly, but by discussion, and his words of objection took their force from the Law but not in a direct, open manner. Saint Cyril the Great

**“They answered and said to him,
'Are you also from Galilee?
Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.’” [52]**

Although Nicodemus did not leave his membership in the Sanhedrim to follow the LORD Christ as His disciple, he testified for Him in the middle of the assembly in the darkest moments.

They based their discussion on several mistakes besides their envy and malevolence. They thought that Jesus was from Galilee, although He was born in Bethlehem of the house of David. They thought that most of His disciples were Galileans, yet He had many disciples from Judea. Moreover, they claimed that no prophet had arisen out of Galilee, but Elijah the prophet was from Gilead.

❖ The Pharisees falsely say about Christ our Savior, “no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.” They should have rather inquired how He who came of Jewish parents (John 6:42) could be a Galilean. They should have taken into consideration that He was brought up in Nazareth. They should not, for this reason, stray from faith. Saint Cyril the Great

❖ When the Pharisees say to Nicodemus, “search and look” they imply that he should go and learn. That is to say, Nicodemus did not know all that was written in the Scriptures.

“And everyone went to his own house.” [53]

The meeting ended and everyone went to his house without reaching a final decision.

Inspired by St. John Chapter 7

Let Living Water Pour Forth in Me

❖ Allow me, dear LORD to record this unique feast.
Thousands and thousands of people were busy erecting their tents
The tents were everywhere in the streets, squares, and fields.
The crowds went out in two processions rejoicing.
One group took tree branches and palm leaves to wave them
And the other group went to Siloam with the chief priest to bring water.
Everybody was eager to participate with great joy in the rituals of the Feast of
Tabernacles.

❖ Behold, I see two secret, serious processions.
One secret procession was of the confused rulers.
They did not feel happy with the feast as long as You lived to serve humanity!
They did their best to get rid of You at any cost!
And they considered every lie was in keeping the law so that they might kill You!

❖ But Your secret procession is truly wonderful!
You refused to go up with Your relatives to Jerusalem for the Feast.
You went as it were in secret to celebrate a true Feast!
Instead of the booths, You desired to build Your city in the hearts of those who
believe in You.
Instead of the olive branches and palm leaves You gave them Your peace and victory.
Instead of the leaders' talks full of hypocrisy, You announced that You are the Truth.
Instead of pouring water from a golden vessel,
You revealed rivers of living water gushing inside us.

❖ Yes. Let living water pour forth in me.
So that instead of celebrating a symbolic feast of tabernacles, I celebrate an eternal,
continuous feast.
Instead of the water of Siloam, I drink the Holy Spirit.
I drink and overflow on my brethren.
Your Spirit turns our wilderness into a divine paradise!
Your Holy Spirit grants us Your true peace!
Your Holy Spirit grants us constant victory!
Your Holy Spirit makes of us a holy city for God.

❖ Yours is the glory, who goes up to Jerusalem.
You change all bitterness into an everlasting joy.
You open my heart's door for Your Father and Your Holy Spirit.
The heavenly find in it their pleasure.



Chapter 8

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Light of the World The One Who has Opened the Door of Hope

The scribes and the Pharisees brought to the Lord Jesus Christ a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They asked whether He would condemn her and have her stoned according to the law of Moses. They probably expected Him to support the sentence of stoning. Consequently, they would ask Him to throw the first stone at her. They believed that this would cause the crowds to be disgusted and therefore turn away from following Him. Those who had been attracted to Him on account of His gentleness and tenderness, even with sinners, would turn away from Him. Should the Lord refuse to condemn her, He would be seen as someone breaking the law and therefore deserve to be condemned to death Himself.

The Lord did not oppose the sentence stated in the law. However, He inquired as to the person who is qualified to implement the sentence, and He said:

“He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first,” [7].

The oldest one among them was the first to leave the place, and then the others followed him out. In the meantime, the Lord kept writing on the ground and in a language that revealed to each one his own hidden sins. The adulterous woman was the only one left standing before the Judge of the whole world. He had not come to condemn, but He had come to save. Therefore the Lord asked her not to return to sin again. He alone had the right to condemn her. However, He opens the door of hope to sinners so that they might repent. He offers Himself as the Liberator of the soul, for He is the Divine Truth [23].

Whereas the Lord is gentle and tender towards sinners, He is stern with the religious leaders. They obeyed and practised the work of Satan their father who is both a murderer and the father of all liars. The Lord wanted to liberate them from being the children of Satan. This would enable them to enjoy the truth rather than lies. They would then practise love rather than indulge in the lust to kill. They claimed to be Abraham’s free children; yet they did not walk in his steps. Rather, they fulfilled the plots of Satan. The Lord Jesus Christ told them how Abraham rejoiced when he saw the day of the Lord, and when he saw that day he was glad [56].

The way the Lord dealt with the adulterous woman reveals the nature of the Lord and His deep love towards sinners. He shines upon them with the rays of love in order to disperse the darkness within them.

- 1- The Woman Caught in Adultery 1-11**
- 2- The Messiah: The Light of the World 12-20**
- 3- The Doom of Unbelievers 21- 30**
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- 7- The Messiah: the Giver of Eternal Life 51- 59**

1- The Woman Caught in Adultery

‘But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives’ [1]

In the previous chapter we have watched how the Lord was being troubled especially by the religious leaders. Now when the evening had come, the Lord left the city and went to Mount Olives. Usually, He would go to rest in the home of a friend, or He would stay in any of the tents that were set up for the Feast of the Tabernacles. Some observers believe that on that evening the Lord could not find anyone in Jerusalem that could receive Him, so He went to Mount Olives. Others believe He went there to spend the night in prayer.

❖ The Lord Jesus Christ spent the whole of the last day of the Feast- which was the eighth day of celebrations- teaching in the temple in Jerusalem. He had criticized the teachings of the Pharisees. In the evening, they left for the day and had returned to their homes; whereas the Lord went up to Mount Olives. During the day the Lord taught in the temple; and at night He would go to Mount Olives. Here the Lord intends to teach us not to own homes bought by our business and to be content with the bare necessities for our comfort; bearing in mind that we will eventually leave these buildings behind and depart to the eternal world. Consequently all our struggle to possess these buildings would have been wasteful and useless.

St. John Chrysostom

‘But early in the morning, He came again to the temple, and all the people came to Him.

And He sat down and taught them’ [2].

The Lord Jesus Christ came early to the temple in order to teach the people. They had come to the One who had taught them the day before, and He had come early to find them. Even though He had probably spent the whole night in prayer on Mount Olives, yet as one who loves His work, He had come early to the temple. His desire is that everyone would enjoy the knowledge He had to offer. Moreover, He loves those who come and seek Him early. Accordingly His words are: “I love them who love Me, and those who seek Me diligently will find Me (Prov.8:17).

The Lord wished to meet with the people within the temple. He had not come to make them abandon their ancient traditions. Rather, He had come to grant them a new understanding and a new concept regarding the law, the temple, and the manner of worship. He sat down to teach them as one who possesses authority. He desired them all to sit with Him, to keep still and enjoy Him as they listened to the truth.

It was customary for the great teachers to sit down while they taught since such meetings could go on for a long time. Note what St. John says: “**...and all the people came to Him....**” The verb ‘came’ implies continuity in the stream of those coming; while the expression ‘...all the people...’ indicates the crowds. Therefore the reference is that there was constant and increasing movement since the early morning (Lk 21:38).

‘Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in their midst... [3]

Some scholars believe that because adultery had become so widespread, some parts of the law concerning that subject were not carried out. For example, the adulterous woman was no longer brought to a priest or made to drink the bitter water (Num 5:14). Moreover, many of the men were guilty of adultery too.

The scribes and Pharisees saw how the crowds were gathered around the Lord and were listening to His teachings since the early morning. Therefore, on the one hand, they sought to spoil this gathering by bringing the adulterous woman. In this way they would distract the attention of the crowds away from the Lord’s teaching. On the

other hand, they wanted to set a trap for the Lord: if He forgave her, He would have broken the law. If He condemned her, the crowds would be repulsed by His cruelty.

‘They said to Him: “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act “[4].

They address the Lord as ‘teacher’ although on the previous day they had called him a ‘deceiver’ (7:47).

The scribes and the Pharisees had failed in the essence of their mission which is to offer to every soul the knowledge of God’s will and consequently enjoy His divine love. They became so preoccupied with the literal application of the law that they neglected man’s salvation and the joyously deep fellowship with God. Therefore it was not hard for them to find a woman caught in adultery and to bring her to the Lord. Each one of them carried a heart made of stone that hungered and flourished by the spilling of blood. They sought to stone both her and the Lord Jesus as well.

They did not realize that the Lord, who is the Word of God, would criticize the law and perfect it. Indeed, He raises it from being deadly letters to constructive words that would sanctify the innermost depths.

Those who were preoccupied with the literal interpretation of the law believed that they would definitely conquer and rejoice as the woman would be stoned to death and banished from life. They believed that she did not deserve to live in a house or even exist on earth. They had decided that she deserved to be thrown in a pit and hit by a shower of stones. They were unaware that they had come to the Almighty Forgiver of sin. He alone would draw her away from the house of Satan and from adultery. He would not only forgive her, but He would also lead her to find the Holy One. She would consequently discover the Bridegroom of her soul and her heavenly nuptial home where she will dwell.

The story of the adulterous woman opens the door of divine love and mercy to every soul. This leads each soul to discover the law of the Lord and its attractive inner aspect. Consequently the soul would hear the divine Voice saying: “ ...for God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved’ (Jn. 3:17; 12:47). Then nothing could have the power to condemn the soul to eternal death. Rather, the soul would have found the One who is willing to buy her with His precious Blood, and grant her heavenly righteousness. The Lord will intercede for her before God and carry her into the Divine embrace. In this manner the whole chain of events is transformed: from being a soul brought before judges ready to condemn her, she is brought into an eternal and heavenly wedding. In his letter to **Eustochum** about the virgins, **St. Jerome** requests them to leave their father’s house- that is Satan’s home- in order to adhere to the heavenly groom. You might ask: ‘I have left my childhood home, I have forgotten my father, and I am born anew in the Lord Jesus. What is my reward? The following words provide the answer: ‘...the King will desire greatly your beauty’ (Ps 45). This is the great mystery, and on that account a man leaves his father and mother and adheres to his bride, and the two become (not one body as the passage says) but one spirit (Eph.5:31-32). Your Bridegroom is neither haughty nor does He belittle you...He leads you into His ways while holding you with His royal hand⁴³⁷.

‘Now Moses in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?’ [5]

⁴³⁷ Letter 22:1

Moses is not the one who issued the sentence concerning stoning an adulterer. Rather, it is found in the commandments and the law that he received from God; and it states that such a deed is to be punished by stoning (Lev. 20:20; Deut 22:22). It was a means of executing the sentence of death in his time.

As the Pharisees thirsted to spill blood, they were driven to invent false and dangerous accusations against the Lord Jesus Christ. They therefore brought this woman and presented her case even though it was incomplete legally. Their accusation was illegal since they had neither brought along the other party involved in the criminal act nor the witnesses that were required by the law. In spite of that, the Lord did not reject her case. On the contrary, He drew everyone's attention to the real meaning of the commandment and the intrinsic intention of the law.

❖ They insisted that the Lord answer their sly questions, and believed He would not be able to get away from their two-edged question. On the one hand, if He would forgive the adulteress they would accuse Him of disregarding the law and the commandments and of approving adultery. On the other hand, if He orders them to stone her He would be discredited of the tenderness and gentleness which attracted the crowds to Him. Nevertheless, the Lord never ceases to be the all compassionate, merciful, and gentle One. He does not circumvent the law and upholds and defends it. He rescues the woman from being killed yet He does not contradict or abolish the law.

St. John Chrysostom

'This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him.

But Jesus stooped down

and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.' [6]

They came to the Lord as they would come to a judge demanding Him to apply the law. Should He decline He would be condemned as a traitor and blasphemer and deserving the death penalty by stoning. They did not realize that He is the heavenly Comforter and Defender who seeks to save sinners and absolves their sins even though He is the Divine Judge.

He **'wrote on the ground with His finger'**: He is the One who wrote the Ten Commandments with His finger on the stone which He delivered to Moses. Now, the Lord writes with His finger on the ground to reveal that they had broken the law. They are unable to execute the penalty of stoning for they are sinners and deserve to die. Today the Lord Jesus Christ writes on the ground of our hearts to transform its corrupt sand into a sanctified heaven. He writes with His Holy Spirit (with His finger) to perfect and fulfill the law. In this manner we will discover our sins and failings rather than be preoccupied with the sins of others; and we will be concerned with our own salvation as well as that of others. Indeed, the Lord records with His finger the work of love filling our depths!

Had the Lord condemned her to death, they would have reported Him to Pontius Pilate. He was the one who had stripped away from the religious leaders their authority and kept it solely in the hands of the Roman governor. Besides, the Roman law did not include a death penalty for adultery. Had He vindicated her, He would have been accused of lenience and legal incompetence in matters concerning chastity and purity.

They were not asking for His advice with a sincere desire to learn the truth and to obey Him. Rather, they were testing Him...therefore they did not deserve to receive a

candid answer from Him. Consequently, He simply revealed to them what lay in their hearts, thoughts and intentions. Although He did not expose each one's wickedness publicly and hid their shame, He embarrassed them as He indicated His intimate knowledge of each one's failings.

❖ If you were to ask me: 'What did the Lord write on the ground?' My answer would be: 'Probably something that led the scribes and Pharisees to feel embarrassed and ashamed. Something that would lead them to repent.'

❖ Their words and opinions could possibly arouse the crowds against the Lord. Eventually, they were able to bring accusations against Him that led to His condemnation. All these acts were directed against whom? Insolence faced uprightness; falsehood opposed truth; the corrupt heart challenged the righteous heart; and ignorance defied wisdom! When have people such as these prepared a net and not fallen headlong into it themselves? Notice how the Lord righteously answers them while maintaining His gentleness. He did not fall into the trap they had set up; whereas they were caught up in it. They were surprised to find that He had drawn them to fall into their very own trap⁴³⁸.

St. Augustine

'So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" [7]

The manner of stoning was done according to the teachings of the Jewish leaders as follows: the hands of the accused were tied behind the back and the person would be half naked. He/she would stand on a platform that would be ten to twelve feet high and two witnesses would then push the accused forcefully causing the condemned to fall down. If the person did not die at that point, one of the witnesses would hit him/her with a huge stone in the chest. Most often this would be fatal. However, this was not the manner followed in all the cases of stoning.

As they press for the Lord's opinion, He remained silent and as though He did not hear them. Finally, He delivered the woman to them and asked them to judge her if they could.

'And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground" [8]

In some interpretations, the explanation is that the Lord was writing down the sins of the accusers. He was writing on sand rather than on marble or copper. In this manner, the writing would remain for a few moments and then disappear. However, the Lord writes our names in the palm of His hands so that they remain inscribed there eternally. As for our sins, He writes them in the earth and on the ground where they would get buried and eventually disappear. He wrote in the earth so that the earth judges the earth. As for the Lord, He came to save and not to condemn.

❖ The Lord seems to be saying: 'I have revealed your sins to you, O scribes and Pharisees: they are similar to those of this adulteress...or even worse...and they are as bad as your own conscience can witness against you. Therefore do not insist on condemning this woman as sternly and harshly as you do. Rather, think of your own sins and examine their gravity; for you are sinners and criminals who deserve to be punished in the same manner. If you condemn her, then condemn yourselves first. Besides, if you decide to stone her, then authorize your own stoning as well...in this manner, the Lord Jesus Christ saved the adulterous woman. He did not oppose the law

⁴³⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*

in this instance for He is the ever Almighty, wise, and merciful One.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The same persons who did not abide by the law are the ones who sought to implement it. They were therefore guilty of neglecting it rather than submitting and obeying the law.

Condemning as adulterers yet claiming chastity!

O Jews, Pharisees, teachers of the law and its guardians, you have now heard...yet you have not acknowledged that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Giver of the Law!

What does the Lord intend when he writes with His finger on the ground?

The law has been written by the finger of God. However, it has been written on stone due to the wickedness of peoples' (stony) hearts. Now, the Lord writes on the ground for He demands fruit. You have heard the law...may it be obeyed, and may the adulterers be merciful...

Does the punishment of this woman through those who deserve condemnation convey that the law has been obeyed?

May every person search himself and delve into his own depths. May he sit on the judgment seat that is in his own mind. Let each one place himself behind the bars of his own conscience and force himself to confess: for no one but the spirit within him knows what lies in his depths; and he will discover that he is a sinner.

Yes indeed, either you leave this woman to go her way, or you will receive with her the punishment stated in the law.

If the Lord had pronounced that she did not deserve to be stoned, He would have appeared to be unjust. Conversely, if He had condemned her He would not have appeared to be merciful. As the gentle and just One, hear Him say: **“He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first”** [7]

This is the Voice of justice. Let the guilty be punished, but not through sinners. Let the law be imposed but not through those who break it⁴³⁹

St. Augustine

“Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last.

And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst” [9]

If they had left, then how was the woman standing in the midst? Those who had left were her accusers. As for the crowds who had come to hear the Lord, they had remained and the woman stood in their midst. It is as though the Lord had not written the sins of all the people. He had written the sins of her accusers only...for he who judges his brother will be judged! And he will be sentenced with the same sentence he has pronounced on others. Those who have been conquered by sin are usually filled with violent sentiments towards sinners. In contrast, the righteous treat sinners gently as they tend to convict themselves rather than others.

The Pharisees paraded to be jealously opposed to sin. At the same time it was evident that they were not free from its bondage. The Lord exposed them (Matt 23:27, 28) as being inwardly unclean and corrupt.

The way they dealt with the adulterous woman not only enabled the Lord to avoid the trap they had set up for Him, but it also led to their fall into that same trap. Indeed,

⁴³⁹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 33:5*

they were brought to shame before the crowds. They were unable to implement the law and none found himself qualified to throw the first stone at the woman. May we never throw stones at our brothers while we ourselves deserve to be stoned.

They were terrified by what the Lord had written on the ground. And so was Nebuchadnezzar when he saw a hand writing on the wall before him (Daniel 5:25). Blessed are those who find their peace in the writings of the Lord Jesus Christ; and woe to those who get terrified and tremble as they read His words.

The Lord Jesus Christ turned the eyes of the people away from the woman's deed and away from the issue of judging her; and led them to focus on their own inner conscience. They were enabled to see their own corruption, repent, and return to love God. Although they discovered their failings, they did not admit them; and instead of accepting the advice of the Physician of souls, they took flight as from a battlefield (2 Samuel 19:3). They feared exposure and embarrassment so they fled. Yet instead of running to the Lord their Savior, they ran away from Him lest His light would expose them.

When the woman's accusers withdrew, she could have run away too. However, she found her salvation with the Lord. The manner with which He dealt with her did not mean that He embraced sin. He proclaimed that He had come to save the world rather than bring condemnation. Therefore sinners and tax gatherers did not fear to come to Him who knows the hidden secrets of all mankind.

The situation quickly changed! Here was a desperate woman awaiting the sentence of stoning to be issued in a few moments; and bloodthirsty leaders eager to condemn her and rejoice in spilling her blood. What terrified her most was the look on their faces rather than the stones they held in their hands. Everyone had abandoned her but she found herself standing before the ultimate Lover of sinners. She felt the amazing Divine work that sanctified her life and won her over into the kingdom of heaven! Instead of fear, she experienced the emotions of some one at a wedding...she saw the heavens rejoicing and awaiting her eternal wedding!

By leaving, the woman's accusers revealed their admission to being guilty of the same crime as hers. Indeed, they left because they feared that the Lord might begin to mention their sins one by one...

'...beginning with the oldest...'...: the oldest among the accusers left first, either because they had committed many sins throughout the years of their lives, or because they were more intelligent and so were affected by the power of the Lord's words.

St. John Chrysostom

When Jesus looked up He found all the accusers had left while the woman stood alone before Him.

So He said to her: "Woman, where are those accusers of yours?

Has no one condemned you?" [10]

'She said: "No one, Lord."

And Jesus said to her: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." [11]

Some scholars find that the woman had been treated in a cruel and violent manner by those who had caught her. Therefore the Lord considered that she had been punished sufficiently.

In saying to the woman: "**Neither do I condemn you**" the Lord seems to imply the following: 'I alone have the power to condemn you, O woman. For I alone am the judge. However, since I have come to save the world and not to condemn, therefore I do not condemn you.'

By telling her to “go” He is really telling her ‘go and feel secure, for your adultery has been removed from you as I have released you of your sins...therefore go...’
The Lord’s words: “**and sin no more...**” can be interpreted as follows: ‘I charge you not to go back and sin again, otherwise I will condemn you. From now on do not go back **‘as a dog returns to his own vomit’** (Prov. 26:11; 2Peter 2:22). Do not sin anymore to avoid condemnation.’

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The most holy One who had the power to change the nature of the five loaves and multiply them; who made the dumb nature of the donkey to speak; who taught the adulteress to be chaste (John 8); who transformed the nature of the burning fire into a cool medium for those thrown into the furnace; and who for Daniel’s sake changed the fierce nature of the lions into a gentle one...can also transform the soul that has become a barren desert due to sin. He alone can lead the soul to enjoy His goodness, mercy, and peace by His Holy Spirit and divine promises.

St. Macarius the Great

❖ We have heard the Voice of Justice [7]. Let us also hear the Voice of Mercy...of the Holy One who has driven away her enemies as He spoke justice, and who has turned His eyes mercifully as He told her: “**Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.**” [11]

May those who love the gentleness of the Lord be warned and fear His truth! For He is good and upright (Ps 25:8). You love Him because He is good...fear Him because He is upright...

The Lord is gentle, patient, and tender. Yet He is also just and upright.

He gives you the chance to improve and correct yourself. Yet you like to delay His judgment more than to correct your ways!

Were you evil yesterday? May you become good today!

Do you continue in the pursuit of evil today? Attempt to change that tomorrow...but how do you know that tomorrow will come?... God has promised to be forgiving to those who correct themselves. Yet He has not promised to extend my life (to tomorrow)!⁴⁴⁰

St. Augustine

St. Augustine warns us against despair as well as against false hope. Those who despair because God is not forgiving kill themselves through their despair. However, those who become careless and are slow to repent, as they trust that the mercy of God will save them tomorrow, are also condemning themselves because of their false hope⁴⁴¹.

2- The Messiah: the Light of the World

‘Then Jesus spoke to them again saying:

‘I am the light of the world.

He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of Life.’ [12]

When the accusers withdrew and the woman left, the Lord continued teaching the crowds. The accusers had wanted to stir and confuse the crowds. However, the Lord intended to focus on His teachings by these words: “**I am the light of the world...**”

⁴⁴⁰ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 33:7*

⁴⁴¹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 33:8*

[12]. Without Him everyone would remain in darkness, despair, and death. The Pharisees realized that by saying these words the Lord was indicating that He is the awaited Messiah, since the prophets had used the symbol of light when they spoke of Him (Is 60:1; 49:7; 9:9). In the writings of **Bamidbar Rabba**, he says: “The Israelites said to God: “ O Lord of the world, You have commanded us to light lamps for You. You are the light of the world, and the light lives through You!⁴⁴²”

“He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness....” In other words: ‘he shall be delivered from ignorance, betrayal, and sin.’

Some scholars find that these words refer to a Jewish custom of adding a ninth day to the Feast of the tabernacles. On that day, they would bring out all the holy books from the storage boxes and place them in a place lit with candles in order to call to mind the words in Proverbs 6:23 ‘For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life.’

Many scholars find that one of the most important memories related to the first Tabernacle is the time when chief priest poured water as we mentioned in the previous chapter. The procedure was followed according to the tradition of ‘**the light**’, and it was done in memory of the pillar of light that went before the people in the wilderness. It led them through the darkness of the night (Ex13:21), and it continued to do so until they crossed over into Canaan in fulfillment of the Divine promise.

During that feast, it was customary to use a huge candlestick with branches. Four of its lamps were filled with oil and they had to use a ladder to go up to light it. The Talmud mentions that it was 50 feet high. This light was exceedingly bright, the Mishah states: “There was no area in Jerusalem where the light was not reflected.” This brilliant light was a very rare sight in the old cities.

Some scholars believe that the candlestick lights were snuffed out after the Feast. The Lord Jesus Christ stood where the lights had been snuffed and He dazzled those coming to the Feast. The darkness had replaced the light, so He proclaimed the need for the Divine light: the Messiah, God’s slave, who is the light who has come for all peoples.

Isaiah states:” I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand, I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house (Is 42:6-7) --- that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth (Is 49:6)

“I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, and I will made my justice rest as a light of the peoples---” (Is 51:4).

The saintly interpreters provide an explanation to the words: “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?” (Ps 27:1). They state that the law is a light. The Lord has proclaimed that He is the divine word, the light of the world, which gives light to every person in the world.

When they claimed that the temple is “the light”, the Lord asked them to destroy the temple and He would rebuild it in three days (Jn 2:20). By saying so, He proclaims, the temple of His Body. This is because He is the resurrection of the temple that embraces all the new creation. The Church/Temple is enlightened by the light of His resurrection.

When St. John the Evangelist speaks of the heavenly Temple, he says:”---for the

⁴⁴² Adam Smith Comm.

Lord God the Almighty and the lamb are its temple-----for the glory of God illuminated the city and the lamb is its light (Rev. 21:23, 24).

The Lord Jesus Christ speaks of man's life as a journey in the middle of a dark world. A person needs the sun of righteousness to shine upon him/her and to accompany him so that he might not stumble. It is appropriate for a believer to follow and be led by that light in all the concerns of his life. He is the true light in which we find our peace. As we look up to Him and make friends with Him; as we have faith and walk in Him, He will become our light. He will enlighten us not only by being a lamp shedding light to our eyes and feet, but to all our body. He will lead us in this world and will lift us up through the Holy Spirit to the heavens. There, we will enjoy the promise of eternity.

The Lord clearly indicates that He is one of the prophets. However, He is the Lord of the world. He is not the light of Galilee, of Palestine, or Israel; but He is 'the light of the world.'

St. John Chrysostom.

If we are priests of the Lord and of God, then I cannot find anyone else whom I ought to follow more than God the Lord. Indeed, He affirms in His Holy Gospel that:” **I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light life**”[12]⁴⁴³.

Caprianus the Martyr

❖ I believe that the Lord's words: '**I am the light of the world**' [12] are clear to those who have the eyes that share this light. As for those who only possess physical eyes, they would be surprised to hear His words: '**I am the light of the world**'⁴⁴⁴.

❖ There is a Light who is the Creator of the sun's light. Let us love that light. Let us yearn to reach out and thirst for Him. Consequently, He will lead and take us to Him. In this manner we will live in Him and we will not die...

The One who shines over you so that you might see Him is the same (source) who flows over you and quenches your thirst....

Even when the Lord Jesus Christ did not reveal himself to everyone as He was hidden by the cloud of this body, yet He is who He is: The One who controls everything through the power of His wisdom...

Your God is fully present in everyplace, and He will never abandon you, if you do not abandon Him⁴⁴⁵.

St. Augustine

❖ Let us follow Him now so that we may be rewarded later on. Let us follow Him in faith, so that we may receive grace later on by our eyes. The apostle accordingly says: "Therefore, we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:6-7). When do we walk by sight? When possess the light of life. When we attain that insight, and when the darkness passes away.

On that day when we will rise again, it is said: "in the morning I will direct (my voice) to you and I will look up" (Ps 5:3).What does 'in the morning' imply? When the night of this world passes away; when the fears of temptation are over; and when that lion roaming in the night and seeking to devour someone has been

⁴⁴³ Letter 63 to the Brother Cecil:18

⁴⁴⁴ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 34:1

⁴⁴⁵ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 34:3-6

conquered.

“In the morning, I will direct (my voice) to you, and I will look up.” Now, my brothers, what do you think: what is our duty in this present life other than what the psalmist says? In another place, he says: “All night I make my bed swim---with my tears” (Ps 6:6)

The Psalmist states that he cries every night and yearns fervently for the light. Therefore the Lord responds to his desire and he says in Psalm 38:10: “...all my desire is before you and my sighing is not hidden from you” (Ps 38:9).

Do you yearn to go? It is impossible for you not to see: for if you ask to go, you proclaim that to all mankind...

Do you yearn for God? Who can see that other than God? Of whom do you ask for God...except from Him? For He can be sought of Himself, as He is the One who has promised to give us Himself.

May the soul lay out her desire and open her wide embrace. Then let her pray and attain what eye has not seen and what ear has not heard and therefore what has “never entered into the heart of man” (1 Cor.2:9)

We can desire and yearn for Him and we can follow after Him. However, we are unable to deserve attaining Him and express Him in words⁴⁴⁶.

St. Augustine

‘The Pharisees, therefore said to Him

“You bear witness of yourself; your witness is not true” [13]

When the Pharisees who had accused the adulteress had left, some of them remained. These wanted to contradict the words of the Lord. They knew **“the light”** is the title of the Messiah whom the people of the Old Testament expected to come, and as it is written in Daniel 2:22

The Pharisees therefore contradicted themselves. For we find in the Old Testament some prophets who bore witness to themselves and who confirmed that they had received divine revelations or prophecies from the heavens. Indeed, some Pharisees had questioned St. John the Baptist and asked: “What do you say about yourself?” If they had listened faithfully to the Lord’s teaching and miracles, they would have discovered that He is the Lord and the Messiah: He did not need any external witness.

‘Jesus answered and said to them:

**“Even if I bear witness of myself,
my witness is true, for I know where I came from
and where I am going; but you do not know where
I came from and where I am going”[14]**

Because the Lord knows that He is the Son of God, He neither attacked nor needed their false witness. He just revealed his identity, His relationship with the Father and the mission He had to fulfill through his incarnation. All this was sufficient testimony for Him.

The Lord confirmed three facts:

First: His conviction concerning the reality of his own identity: Here there is no doubt or any need to argue. He knows who He is before descending from heaven; revealing Himself to the world: He came from the Father and is returning to Him (Jn 16:28). He came from glory and is returning to it (Jn 17:5)

Secondly: They were not qualified to judge Him or His teaching, for they were

⁴⁴⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate :34:7*

ignorant and wanted to remain in the darkness of their ignorance. They condemned Him according to their physical whims. Indeed they were not qualified to judge matters that are divine and spiritual. Although the Lord qualified to judge and condemn -being the fair Judge- yet He postponed judgment until His second coming. **Thirdly:** His testimony for Himself is confirmed by the testimony of the Father for Him [18].

❖ The Lord Jesus Christ has the prophets witnessing for Him. These had been sent before Him. They acted as the ushers or heralds who run before the Judge. John the Baptist also witnessed for Him. Nevertheless, the greatest testimony is the one He bears to Himself... He is the true light who enlightens everyone who comes into the world⁴⁴⁷.

❖ “---for I know where I came from and where I am going...” The One speaking to you in person possesses all things, yet He still came. However, by coming He has not left the other possessions (the heavens). Besides, He will not abandon us when He returns over there.

Why are you amazed? He is God and what has occurred cannot be done by man. It cannot happen even with the sun; for it is ready to set, the sun leaves the East. In this manner, it has to return there when it rises... As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He comes and yet He is still the (in the heavens); and when He returns, He is still here (on earth). Listen to the words of the Evangelist: “No one has seen God at anytime. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” The Evangelist does not say ‘who was in the bosom of the Father’ as this would have implied that by His coming He had left the Father’s embrace...

The Lord was speaking here on earth, and at the same time He proclaimed that He was present there, in the heavens, too.

When the time drew near for Him to leave this place, He said: “...lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20)⁴⁴⁸.

St. Augustine

❖ Whoever denies that the Son proceeds from the Father, does not know the Father from whom the Son proceeds. Moreover, that person does not know the Son because he does not know the Father⁴⁴⁹.

St. Ambrose

“You judge according to the flesh, I judge no one.”[15]

When the Word became flesh, the Pharisees condemned Him according to the flesh. They thought He was merely a man. They did not realize the reality of His being the Word, the wisdom, and the power of the Almighty God. His work testified to His being the promised Messiah. They deceived their own selves as they attempted to measure divinity with human terms and spirituality with physical ones.

They studied the law and the divine promises with physical eyes. Therefore the Holy Book became a literal study, upholding temporary salvation, false honor, and the deadly literal word. Consequently they stumbled when they had to recognize the Messiah and the Father who had sent Him.

❖ To live according to the flesh implies that a person is living in a wicked manner.

⁴⁴⁷ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate :34:3-6*

⁴⁴⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 35:5*

⁴⁴⁹ *On Christian Faith, Book 19:127*

Similarly, a person who condemns according to the flesh, does so incorrectly⁴⁵⁰.

❖ **“I judge no one” [15]:** For if I wanted to condemn, then you would have been condemned...but the time of judgment has not come yet. Here the Lord implies that He will not be alone but the Father will also be with Him to condemn them⁴⁵¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ We say that there will be one Judge for the living and the dead. Yet the Lord says about himself: **“I judge no one.”** This matter can be solved in two ways: We either understand it to mean ‘I do not judge anyone now’ which agrees with the Lord’s words, ‘I have not come to judge the world but to save it.’ The Lord does not deny that He judges but states that He delays judgment. Or, because He says: **“...you judge according to the flesh”[15],** and He adds that **“I judge no one”** in order to indicate that does not do like them, who judge according to the flesh⁴⁵².

St. Augustine

**“And yet, if I do judge, my judgment is true,
for I am not alone,
but I am with the Father who sent Me”[16].**

❖ The Lord indicates clearly that He is not alone in condemning them. Indeed, the Father too is with Him and demands that they would be judged⁴⁵³.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ It is as though the Lord is saying: **‘My judgment is righteous, because I am the Son of God.’** How do you prove you are the Son of God? **“... for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me.”** There is one Essence, one Divinity, an eternal fellowship, complete equality without any conflict...yet the Father is the Father, the Son is the Son...and the Son is a different icon from the Father. This is what we truly believe. Stating that He is different in nature is false. I am not the Son in a manner which hinders Me from being with the Father; neither can He be the Father in a manner which hinders Him from being with me. I have taken on the form of a slave, yet I have not lost the image of God⁴⁵⁴.

St. Augustine

❖ May we choose the Lord to be our Judge, my dear brothers. For God is our witness against men’s tongues and their suspicious. He is the one who will not refuse to bear witness and who will be all the more glorious when He is Judge. That is because the Witness himself will be the Judge as well⁴⁵⁵.

St. Augustine

“It is also written in you law that the testimony of two men is true” [17].

Although it is possible that two or more could agree to bear witness falsely (1 Kings 21:10); yet it would be accepted as a true testimony as long as it is not contradicted (Dent 17:6 , Num. 35:30)

⁴⁵⁰ Hom 52.PG 59:307

⁴⁵¹ Hom 52.PG 59:307

⁴⁵² St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 36:4

⁴⁵³ Homilies on St. John 52:2

⁴⁵⁴ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 36:9

⁴⁵⁵ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 36:11

**“I am one who bears witness of Myself,
and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me”[18].**

Just as the Father and Son participated together in the creation, so do they work together for man’s salvation. The Son does not work alone but He works with the Father who also bears witness of Him.

St. John Chrysostom believes that the Pharisees knew that He is the Messiah, yet on account of their jealousy they addressed Him as though they had not recognized Him. They had come to test Him and therefore He considered that they did not deserve an answer from Him. Consequently, He did not quote any Old Testament prophecies or symbols pointing to His person. He just stated that He bears witness to Himself, indeed his miracles, teachings, and the Cross, whose moment was getting closer, all were witnesses for Him. He did not need another witness; for the Father bore witness of Him as He is one with the Son⁴⁵⁶.

Do you not agree that the Lord said so to indicate that He is of the same Essence and has no need for any other witness, and that He is not lesser than the Father? At least take note of His independence (distinct feature)⁴⁵⁷!

If the Messiah is a lesser being than the Father, the Lord would not have said these words! Now, and so that you do not imagine that the Father has been added to witness in order to meet the requirement of two (witnesses), note that His authority is different from that of the Father’s. A person comes to witness when he is self confident and not when he himself needs a witness. This is true for others too. If that person is involved in wrong doing then he needs the testimony of another witness as he cannot be trusted. However, this is a different case completely, since when the Lord witnesses for himself and when there is someone else to witness of Him, then this confirms that He is trustworthy. In every way, He will proclaim His independence (without separation).

He puts himself first: **“I am One who bears witness of Myself”** [18]. It is evident that the Lord reveals his equality in honor. Besides, they will not benefit at all by saying that they know the Father while they have not recognized the (Messiah).

The problem is that they do not wish to recognize Him. Therefore the Lord tells them that it will be impossible for them to know the Father without knowing the Son first. Indeed, He is the One who attracts them to know the Father. By leaving them, even if they would have sought to know the Father, the Lord says: “you cannot know the Father without Me.” For he who blasphemes against the Son, does not do so against Him alone, but also against the One from whom He comes⁴⁵⁸.

St. John Chrysostom

“Then they said to him:

where is your Father?

Jesus answered: you know neither Me nor the Father.

If you had known Me, you would have known my Father also.”[19]

The Lord Jesus Christ accused them of not knowing God. It is true that God had been known in Judaism (Ps 67:1). They actually had partial knowledge of God as they recognized Him to be the Creator of the world, yet their eyes were darkened and they could not see the glory of the light shining upon the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason for their ignorance of God lay in their ignorance of the person of the Lord

⁴⁵⁶ cf *Homilies on St. John* 52:3

⁴⁵⁷ *Homilies on St. John* 52:3

⁴⁵⁸ *Homilies on St. John* 52:3

Jesus Christ who reveals the knowledge of the Father.

❖ The expression: "...you both know me and you know where I am from" (Jn7:28) is a reference to His person as a human being. As for the saying: "you know neither Me nor my Father" this is a reference to His divinity... Clearly, when the people of Jerusalem said "...we know where this man is from" (Jn 7:27) they were referring to the fact of his birth in Bethlehem (Matt 2:1). They knew His mother was Mary and that His brothers (actually his cousins) were James, Joses, Simon, and Judas (Matt 13:55). That explains why the Lord answered to the testimony of those who said: "we know where this man is from" by saying: "you both know me and you know where I am from." However, when the Lord speaks to the Pharisees, He says: " **Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going.**" As He speaks of His divine nature, He is speaking about Himself as the basis and first born over all creation (Col. 1:15)⁴⁵⁹

Origen

Some heretics believe that when the Lord said to the Pharisees "**...nor my Father**" He meant that His Father is someone other than the Creator whom they knew through their reading of the Old Testament. However, the ignorance of the Pharisees, evident in this passage, arises from their wickedness. The wicked do not know God even though they could believe in Him as the Creator; and even though they could speak of Him as God. Indeed they neither remained steadfast, nor walked according to His pleasure.

❖ If someone is able to present a full account of matters concerning God; and if he has learned from his fathers that God alone is to be worshipped; yet still does not walk righteously, then the Bible speaks of such person as one who does not carry the knowledge of God.

A person truly knows about matters concerning the Creator and priestly service to him, then the children of Eli the priest possessed such knowledge, for they lived in the temple, the place of worship- yet in spite of that, they committed sins; we are told in the first book of Samuel: "...the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord" (1 Sam 2:12)...

The same is applicable in the case of the wicked rulers of Israel and Judea, and not only to the sons of Eli. In the same manner the Pharisees did not know the Father, for they did not live according to the will of the Creator!⁴⁶⁰

Origen

❖ When the Lord spoke about God his Father, they questioned Him, saying: "**Where is your Father?**" They were able to know the Lord's Father in the flesh. Therefore they condemned His words, as they put them in a carnal context. However, the One speaking to them was the One who had appeared in the flesh; whereas the hidden One is the Word: the tangible human being and the intangible God... they despised Him as they did not know Him. And they did not recognize Him since they did not see Him. They did not see Him because they were blind; and they were blind due to their lack of faith!⁴⁶¹

'We see You alone; and we do not see your Father with you. Therefore how do you say that you are not alone and that you are with your Father? Otherwise, show us that the Father is with you.'

⁴⁵⁹ *Commentary on John, Book 19:7,10*

⁴⁶⁰ *Commentary on John, Book 19:13,15*

⁴⁶¹ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 37:1*

“These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple, no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come” [20]

The treasury: St. John the Evangelist reports that **the treasury** was the place where Jesus went to deliver his teachings. Probably he is referring to an area where people brought their contributions to the temple, so St. John is not referring to the place where the precious treasures of the temple were stored. The area where Jesus went was part of the Women’s court. Thirteen boxes in the form of a horn were placed there for the offerings. On each box, there was an inscription indicating how the contributions would be used. In that manner, the giver would place his/her contribution according to the service he desires to be fulfilled. The place is called ‘the women’s court, but it does not really indicate that it is reserved for women only, or that men are forbidden to enter., rather it indicates that the women are allowed to enter there, and not into other areas. The Gentiles are allowed to enter into ‘the court of Gentiles’, while it does not prohibit the Jews from entering there.

The people liked the ‘women’s court’ as the four candlesticks in it were lit during the Feast of the Tabernacles which we mentioned earlier. This area was also called Gazith and it was located opposite the area where the Sanhedrin was held. That explains why during his trial, the Lord said: “I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing” (John 18:20).

Before the whole nation, as well as before the Sanhedrin, the Lord proclaimed that they did not know the Father because they did not recognize the Lord [19]. In spite of that, they were unable to arrest Him.

Their uncontrolled tongues blasphemed against Him, yet their hands were bound because His hour had not yet come. The Lord had bound them, through his divine power, and they were restrained until it was time for his crucifixion.

The Evangelist writes about the Lord: “... **for his hour had not yet come.**” By this St. John indicates that the time had not yet come and which God had set for the Lord Jesus Christ to be crucified. In that sense his crucifixion did not occur through the power of the rulers. Indeed it occurred by God’s divine plan. Indeed, they had tried to kill Him before and had failed; and they were powerless after that. Indeed, had He wanted, He could have prevented his crucifixion.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The Lord’s presence in the place where the people brought their contributions to help the needy; and in the treasury of the temple where the common good is achieved, indicates that the Lord brings goodness more than anyone and anything. He offers these words concerning eternal life (Jn 6:68); besides his teachings about God (the Father), and about Himself as he says: **“I am the light of the world...”** [12].

His presence in the treasury is more valuable than any currency, and this is why the Lord says: **“... If you know me, you would have known my Father also.”** Note also all the rest of his teachings on this subject.

All the gold that others offered seems like a grain of sand when compared to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the silver would be like dirt in comparison (Ezekial 7:19). Indeed, every word that the Lord pronounces is altogether

wisdom...⁴⁶²

❖ The Lord did not say all He knew when He was teaching in the treasury. He said only what the people there could comprehend. Actually, we do not believe that the whole world could contain the totality of God's word (Jn 21:25)⁴⁶³.

❖ Although the Lord taught many things in the treasury and in the temple, yet no one arrested Him. This is because His words were more powerful than those who wanted to catch him. As long as He was speaking, none of those who planned against Him could arrest him. However, when they caught Him, He was silent. It is for this reason that He kept silent when Pilate interrogated him; and also when He was beaten (Jn 19:9). This was the time when He wanted to suffer on behalf of the world. Had he spoken, he would not have been crucified due to weakness (2 Cor.13:4). Indeed, there is no weakness in the Speaker who is the Word⁴⁶⁴.

Origen

3- The Doom of Unbelievers:

'Then Jesus said to them again:

"I am going away and you will seek Me, and will die in you sin.

Where I go you cannot come."[21]

The Lord Jesus Christ issues a warning to unbelievers. Their denial will propel them to eternal suffering. He also offers words of encouragement and grace to the meek and simple souls. The warnings he directs to unbelievers are terrifying since there would be no time to repent. Accordingly He says: "They are like children sitting in the market place and calling to one another saying: We played the flute for you and you did not dance; we mourned to you and you did not weep."(Lk 7:32). Very often the Lord opens the gate of hope in this manner and through kind and gentle words. Yet He also uses stern warnings to protect his children from stumbling; or to encourage them to rise up and move away from what they have stumbled into.

"I am going away": They prayed Him to leave them, for they neither wanted Him nor did they want to hear His words. Here, the Lord is telling them that He was going to leave, that in leaving them they would die in their sin rather than have life. When they would be in trouble they would seek the help of the Messiah whom they have rejected and crucified. However, He will not be found according to their whims. They had rejected him and gone after false messiahs who offer the wrath of God rather than eternal life.

They seek Him yet their materialistic and literal minds confine them within the limits of the earth. Therefore they seek but do not find Him; for he has ascended into the heavens. They seek him while they are imprisoned in the grave of temporal glory and material business. Consequently, they do not find him. He is the light of the world and because they die in their sins they are unable to see the One who forgives sins and redeems souls from corruption. In this manner, the heavenly Physician exposes the disease to the sick ones as he wants them to accept to meet with Him and enjoy being healed.

❖ **"your sin..."** occurs in the Greek version in the singular (not in the plural) as the focus is on the sin of blasphemy and rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice that St. John the Evangelist directs our eyes to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Savior of the world. More than any other evangelist, he repeats the verb **'to die'** and

⁴⁶² *Commentary on John, Book 19:53-55*

⁴⁶³ *Commentary on John, Book 19:59*

⁴⁶⁴ *Commentary on John 19:59-61*

the noun **‘to sin’** so many times: “to die” occurs thirty eight times in the Gospel of St. John, in contrast to five times in Matthew, nine times in Mark, and ten times in Luke. Indeed, it has not occurred so densely in any other New Testament Book except in Romans where it occurs twenty three times only. The words ‘to sin’ occurs seventeen times in the Gospel of St. John; while it only occurs seven times in Matthew, six times in Mark, and eleven times in Luke. However, St. John does not aim to direct our focus on sin and its consequent fruit of death. For although sin is deadly, his focus is on the Conqueror of sin. Through the power of His Cross, we live in the spirit of victory and triumph. Moreover, we are enabled to lead a new life rather than suffer spiritual death. The Lord had said these words on the previous day too (Jn 7:34).

❖ **“ I am going away and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin”**: We wonder if the Lord was saying these words to all those present and listening to Him or just to those present whom He knew did not believe. These would consequently be unable to follow Him and would die in their sin. They would be unable because they were unwilling and had become handicapped. They deserved what the Word pronounced: **“to die in your sin”**⁴⁶⁵.

Someone may comment: Since He directs these words to people who insist on not believing, then why does the Lord tell them “you will seek Me”? Truly, there are many ways of seeking the Lord who is the Word, the Truth, and all Wisdom. Nevertheless...to **‘seek’** is sometimes used to refer to those planning against him, as this verse reveals: ‘Then they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come (Jn 7:30). Also this verse: ‘I know that you are Abraham’s descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you’ (Jn 8:37). In John 8:40, we read the words: “But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God.” (8:40). Therefore the words **“... you will seek Me”** is directed to those who seek in the wrong way. It does not oppose the promise. “...for he who seeks finds...” (Matt 7:8). There are always distinctions among those who seek the Lord Jesus Christ. Not everyone asks for salvation in the correct manner or with the purpose of being blessed by Him⁴⁶⁶.

“...You will die in your sin.” [21] If this is interpreted in the usual clear manner, it conveys that sinners will die in their sins; whereas the righteous will die in their righteousness. However, when “will die” is interpreted to refer to the death of the enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor.15:26) the reference is to those who will die as a result of having committed a sin leading to death (1 Jn 5:16). It is clear that these words have been directed to those who had not yet died. You may wonder: what will happen to those who are still alive and have not yet believed? Yet they will die some day? One of them may claim that though they have not believed as yet, they have not committed a sin leading to death. Besides, there are those who have not received the Word and so have not committed a deadly sin. They are alive and suffering of the disease in the souls; and this disease does not lead to death (Jn 11:4)...⁴⁶⁷.

❖ May we be cautious not to catch the disease of death. Our sickness may be healed through (repentance). It is different from the disease that is impossible to heal (the insistence not to repent)⁴⁶⁸.

❖ Let us compare the verse in Ezekial 18:20 “The soul who sins shall die.” with the Lord’s words **“you will die in you sin.”** Indeed, sin is the death of the soul. We do not believe that this applies to all sin; it applies only to the sin that St. John describes

⁴⁶⁵ Commentary on John, Book 19:70

⁴⁶⁶ Commentary on John, Book 19: 72-73

⁴⁶⁷ Commentary on John, Book 19:79-80

⁴⁶⁸ Commentary on John, Book 19:82

as 'sin leading to death' (1 Jn 5:16).

❖ Let us further underline the distinction between a sin that leads to the death of the soul and another sin that indicates a sickness of the soul. And there probably is a third kind of sin that is the one which leads to the loss of the soul. The following words refer to this last kind: "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matt 16:26; Lk 9:25). Also refer to the verse: "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss" (1Cor 3:15)⁴⁶⁹.

Origen

Sin is a dangerous disease that infects that whole person- his soul and body - and consequently death reigns over that person. However, by the coming of the incarnate Word of God, who is the Physician of both the soul and body, He made a distinction between two kinds of sins or two kinds of diseases. There is a disease that does not cause death (Jn 11:4). Indeed, it works for the glory of God as it refers to (the soul) that accepts God's word. Therefore she abandons the grave of corruption, enjoys removing all sinful ties, and witnesses to the One who is risen and grants resurrection. The other kind of disease is that which causes death. The Lord speaks about this last kind as He addresses some of his hearers who will seek Him and die in their sin. The Lord is referring to those who are determined to reject Him until they die. These commit a sin that leads to death (1Jn 5:16)

❖ The Lord says: "**I am going away and you will seek Me [21]**", not because you yearn for Me but due to your hatred. After the Lord moved out of their human sight, they all searched for Him. Those who hated Him as well as those who loved Him looked for Him. The first sought Him with the spirit of persecution, while the others sought Him with the desire to receive and hold Him⁴⁷⁰.

❖ It is right to follow the path the disciples took when you pray to live the life of the Lord; and it is wrong to want to live according to Him in the manner of the Jews for these sought Him with a perverted heart: what did the Lord add? "**... and you will seek Me-** not because you have good intentions- "**therefore you will die in your sin.**" This happens to those who seek the Lord in a wrong manner and consequently die in their sin: the sin of hating the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only One where salvation is found. Clearly, whereas there are those who have hope in God and who do not repay evil for evil; there are also those who repay goodness by wickedness.

❖ "**... where I go you cannot come**": the Lord said the same words to his disciples on another occasion. However, He did not tell them: "**...you will die in you sin...**" as He did not deprive them of hope. Earlier, the Lord had informed them that it would be some time before they would go to the place where He was going. This is because at the time the Lord was speaking to his disciples, it was impossible for them to follow Him; they would join Him later on. As for His other hearers, and based on His fore knowledge, the Lord knew that they would not join Him and therefore He said: "**... you will die in your sin**",⁴⁷¹.

St. Augustine

❖ The Lord intended to touch their souls, and embarrass and terrify them by His words. Note the fear that filled them as a result. Although they wished to kill Him and so get rid of Him, yet they asked where He planned to go. They imagined that His words would have dangerous consequences. The Lord also had another aim and that

⁴⁶⁹ *Commentary on John, Book 19:85*

⁴⁷⁰ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:1*

⁴⁷¹ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:2*

was to underline that His (death) will not happen as a result of their power. Therefore He spoke openly to them about it and predicted His resurrection⁴⁷².

St. John Chrysostom

‘So the Jews said:

**‘Will He kill himself because He says,
‘Where I go you cannot come?’’[22]**

When the Lord said these words on another occasion, they thought that He was going to the Greek cities to preach among the Jews who were dispersed there. However, this time they realized that He was speaking about His death! This reveals how they thought of Him not only as a human being like any of them but that He was even more wicked as He was going to commit suicide out of despair.

❖ **‘...where I go you cannot come’[22]**, because when someone dies in sin, he/she cannot go to the place where the Lord Jesus Christ reigns. Indeed, no dead person can follow the Lord for ‘...the dead do not praise the Lord/ nor any who go down in silence. But we will bless the Lord (Ps 115:17-LXX 26)⁴⁷³.

❖ The Lord’s power to die by His own free will, and to abandon the flesh behind Him is revealed in His words: **‘I am going away’**⁴⁷⁴.

❖ The Judaic writings state the Lord Jesus Christ would be born in Bethlehem and that He would come from the tribe of Judah. This is according to the correct interpretation of the prophetic words. Moreover, concerning His death, tradition reports that He would withdraw from life in the manner we have indicated earlier. It is evident that the Jews were aware that it would be impossible to follow someone who would be leaving in this manner. It would be impossible for anyone even if he understood these matters, to follow and go where the Lord was going. That is why they did not intend it literally when they said: **‘...will He kill himself, because He says: ‘where I go you cannot come?’ [22]...’**⁴⁷⁵.

❖ Anyway, we believe that they said these words as they knew what tradition reported concerning the death of the Lord. Therefore, rather than glorify the One who would depart from life through the Cross, they craftily said: **‘will He kill Himself?’**⁴⁷⁶

❖ They might have hesitated, yet they seemed to allude to His glory which would be revealed at the time of His death. It is as though they were saying: “Does His spirit depart when He leaves the body behind and by His own will?” Is that why the Lord said: **‘where I go You cannot come?’**⁴⁷⁷

❖ Contemplate also the words of St. Paul who says something similar to that in these words: ‘...Christ has given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God (Eph 5:2)⁴⁷⁸.

Origen

❖ The Scribes and Pharisees behaved just like other people who typically think, understand and judge matters according to the flesh. When they heard the Lord’s words, they said: **‘will He kill Himself?’**... What a way to utter these violent words that reveal exceeding ignorance...By saying **‘where I go..’**, the Lord did not mean

⁴⁷² *Homilies on St. John 53:1*

⁴⁷³ *Commentary on John, Book 19:83*

⁴⁷⁴ *Commentary on John, Book 19:111*

⁴⁷⁵ *Commentary on John, Book 19:104*

⁴⁷⁶ *Commentary on John, Book 19:113*

⁴⁷⁷ *Commentary on John, Book 19:114*

⁴⁷⁸ *Commentary on John, Book 19:119*

going to death , but going to that which is after death.⁴⁷⁹ .

St. Augustine.

**‘And He said to them,
“You are from beneath;
I am from above.
You are of this world;
I am not of this world” [23].**

According to human wisdom, no one can determine his fate if he decides to end his life by his own hands. That is why they thought the Lord was speaking about his death by committing suicide. They probably wished to spread this rumor to spoil His image before the people. Suicide is a crime that the law condemns, since it involves the spilling of man’s blood: “I will demand a reckoning ...I will require the life of man” (Gen 9:5). The picture of Ahithophel, who committed suicide, remains to be a severe example of a corrupt life (2 Sam.17:23). It is true that Samson chose to kill himself in return for the death of thousands of idol worshippers who died with him. Besides, there are those who admire the ones who died in the stronghold of Massada who chose to kill themselves and their families rather than be captured by the Romans. Nevertheless, suicide in the mind of the public is a sin of despair; and the fire of hell is the sentence brought against those who commit it. The historian Josephus mentions this when he says that it is necessary to bury the bodies of the enemies promptly; but those who have committed suicide are left without burial until sunset and as a form of punishment. He mentions that in some nations the custom was to cut off the right hand of the person who had committed suicide since it had the audacity to separate the body from the soul. Consequently, the hand was separated from the body.

This was the prevalent thought of the Jews during the time of Christ They considered suicide a sin. This was in total opposition to many Greek scholars who considered suicide an act of bravery that is praise worthy. These scholars believed that through suicide a person ends his temporary life and transports himself to enjoy a long and honorable life.

The Lord Jesus Christ exposes the reason for their ignorance concerning Him. The reason why they could not understand from where He had come and where He was going: It arises from the difference between His nature and theirs. It is as though He is telling them: “You are able to practice the act of killing, even that of killing yourselves, because you come from below and because there is nothing godly within you. You are from below: earthly, physical, and satanic.

They are from the earth and earthly; He is from heaven: the infinite Creator.

Therefore they need to comprehend His divinity and believe in Him. For “... **if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins**” (24).

❖ In thus passage, the Lord is referring to earthly thoughts and physical aspirations as He says: “.. **I am not of this world.**” It is not a denial that he became incarnate, but it does indicate that He is far removed from their craftiness.

St. John Chrysostom

Origen comments that those who are from below ultimately belong to this world. However not everyone who is of this world comes out of it. Indeed, a person can be a citizen of heaven (Phil 3:20). Besides, even though a person proceeds from below and

⁴⁷⁹St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:2*

is of the world, yet it is possible for him/her to be transformed. They could become from above and so no longer belong to this world.

❖ Such a person resolves not to belong to this world any more; for he was from below and of this world and chose to be transformed and be born from above... therefore the Lord tells his disciples: “Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you...” (John 15:19). Indeed the Savior came to call and save those who are lost (Lk 19:10). Besides, He came to transfer those who are from below and those who have been registered as citizens, whose names have been moved from among those from below to those who belong above. He is the same Lord who has descended to all the levels below the earth and for the sake of those who were waiting there (Eph. 4:9-10). He is also the same One who has ascended above all the heavens and has prepared the way for those who seek Him. These have become His true disciples walking in the path that leads to matters above the heavens- in other words, intangible matters⁴⁸⁰.

❖ Pay attention, if you want to learn who is from below according to the Holy Bible, and who is from above; then know that ‘ the treasure of every person is found in his/her heart’ (Matt. 6:21). He who stores his treasure on earth comes from below as a result of such action. Whereas when someone stores his treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:20), then he is born from above and bears the image of the heavenly Man (John 3:3, 1 Cor. 15:49). By ascending into the heavens, such a person fully attains his heavenly destination⁴⁸¹.

❖ It is possible to state that a person from below practices the deeds of the flesh, whereas the one from above bears the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Again it is possible to state that a person from below loves this world whereas a person who loves God comes from above according to St. John’s words (1 John 2:15). A person who does not love the world, nor the things in the world, is not of the world. Rather that person says “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. 6:14-16)⁴⁸².

Origen

❖ What does the Lord say to those who carry earthly features? He says to them “**You are from beneath**” (Jn 8:23)... Therefore you bear the taste of the earth since you like the earth just as the snakes do.

You eat the earth, ...what does this mean?

You get nourished by earthly matters and find pleasure in them. You open your mouth to speak of worldly things, and your hearts do not seek heavenly matters.

“You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world,” [23].

But how could He be from below while He is the One who has created the world? All those who are from below have come after the world had been created; indeed the world preceded them. Consequently, man comes from the world.

Since the Lord Jesus Christ has existed before the world, and there was nothing at all that existed before Him, for “In the beginning was the word, ...and all things were made through him” (John 1:1,3). Therefore He comes from Him who is above... from the Father himself. There is no one above God and He created the

⁴⁸⁰ Commentary on John, Book 19:135-137

⁴⁸¹ Commentary on John, Book 19:138

⁴⁸² Commentary on John, Book 19:139

Word equal to him and in everlasting fellowship with Him ; the only Son since time infinite, who has laid the basis of time⁴⁸³.

❖ Dear brothers, the Lord had explained to us what He intends us to understand concerning His accusers: **“You are from beneath.”** He is actually saying, “You are of this world” for they were sinners, wicked, unbelievers, and had the aroma of earthly things...

But what did the Lord Himself tell the apostles? **“...I chose you out of the world”** (John 15:19). Therefore those who were from beneath were transformed into persons who were not from beneath. They began to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ who created the world. As for those (the Jews) who continued to be from beneath, they were told that **“...(they) will die in (their) sin”** (24)⁴⁸⁴.

❖ He who has created the world has come to you and saved you from this world. If the world dazzles you, then you wish to be impure forever. But if the world ceases to dazzle you, then you are truly pure.

However, if the world still appeals to you due to certain defects, then let the One who has the power to purify you live in you. As a result, you will become pure as well⁴⁸⁵.

St. Augustine

“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins, for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” [24].

❖ The Lord came for this reason: to take away the sins of the world; for it is impossible for mankind to get rid of them except through washing them away. Therefore it is necessary for the person who believes not to depart from this world while bearing the old man. As long as a person does not, through faith, kill the old man, bury, and die in him (the old man), then he will go to that place and be punished for his earlier sins⁴⁸⁶.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Since a person who does not believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah dies in his sins, then clearly a person who believes in him does not die in his sins. However a person, who dies in sin, even though he claims to believe, is still an unbeliever because he is merely concerned with the truth; and his claim to faith is void of deeds. Such faith is, therefore, a dead one; and is similar to that kind which is mentioned in the epistles. In the epistle of James, such faith is condemned (James 2:17)⁴⁸⁷.

❖ Therefore, who is that person who believes, or who is convinced to have a nature that agrees with the Word and unites with Him? Such a person does not commit the sin which is described as one leading to death (1 Jn 5:16). That person does not sin – according to these verses – and does not resist in any manner the upright word but lives according to the words: “whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...”⁴⁸⁸.

❖ He who believes that the Word was with God since the beginning (Jn 1:1) would never do any unreasonable act as he meditates upon God’s word. And whoever believes that the Lord is our peace (Eph 2:14) does not wish to engage in any conflict, such as those who delight in war or seek to arouse trouble. Moreover, since the Lord Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God as well as His power (1

⁴⁸³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:4*

⁴⁸⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:6*

⁴⁸⁵ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:6*

⁴⁸⁶ *Hom 53.PG 59:311*

⁴⁸⁷ *Commentary on John, Book 19:152*

⁴⁸⁸ *Commentary on John, Book 19:153*

Cor 1:24); then a person who believes in Him, and that He is the source of power, will not be weak in doing good works....

For we believe that He is the source of stability and power based on the verse, "And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you" (Ps 39:7). Therefore, when we surrender to anxiety, we reveal that we do not believe in Him who grants stability. And if we become weak, then we do not really believe that He is the power⁴⁸⁹.

Origen

The Jews are miserable because they die in their sins and not because they commit sin. This is what every Christian needs to avoid, and it is why we accept baptism. It is also why those who are in danger due to sickness or some other problems seek help; and why a mother carries, with pure hands, her child to church. She does not want him to go out into the world without baptism. Otherwise, he would die in the sin with which he/she was born⁴⁹⁰.

❖ If you believe that I am He, you will not die in your sins. The Lord brings hope to those who are fearful. There is hope for those who are asleep; for they will wake up and their hearts will enjoy constant renewal. Indeed, after the Lord's crucifixion, many believed. The Bible testifies that many were members of Christ, but had not yet joined His Holy Body. Indeed, some of those who had crucified and hung Him up on the Cross, later became members in the Lord. They had mocked Him as He hung up there, and the one who had struck His side with the sword, as well as those who had offered Him vinegar to drink.... Of all these, the Lord said: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"⁴⁹¹.

St. Augustine

Referring to the Lord's words, "... if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins," St. Augustine comments that the Lord Jesus Christ intended to remind them of the words God had spoken to Moses, "I am who I AM" (Ex 3). This was God's answer when Moses asked him about his name. By this, God indicates that He is the beginning; He is the past, the present, and the future⁴⁹².

Then they said to him:

"Who are you?"

And Jesus said to them,

"Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning..." [25]

The Lord's answer to them could be restated as follows: "I am the beginning", or 'Arche.' Just as I have spoken to you in the Old Testament, I have not changed. From the beginning, it has been written that from the seed of the woman, the head of the snake shall be bruised (Gen. 3:15). This is the essence of the faith of the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The Lord Jesus Christ is the Intercessor achieving the promise and the subject of the prophecies. From the beginning of His service, He declared to the Jews that He is the Son of God, the Bread of Life. Why did they continue to ask this question which He had answered repeatedly. The Lord informed them that He is the Savior of the world. Yet they asked, 'Who are you that you threaten in this manner? What authority do you have over us?'

❖ It is as though the Lord was telling them: "You are totally unqualified to hear My words or even learn who I am. For everything you say is with the purpose of testing

⁴⁸⁹ *Commentary on John, Book 19:155-157*

⁴⁹⁰ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:6*

⁴⁹¹ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:7*

⁴⁹² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38*

Me, and you have not considered anything of My teachings. I could use all these matters as testimonies against you.” This is the implication of this verse⁴⁹³.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Those who had heard the Lord teaching with great authority were obliged to ask who it was who uttered these words. The Savior then proclaimed, “ ... **if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.**” [24]. Thus He reveals that He is greater than any human being. Indeed, He bears the divine nature⁴⁹⁴.

Origen

**“I have many things to say and to judge concerning you,
but He who sent Me is true;
and I speak to the world these things which I heard of Him.” [26]**

The Lord declares that He can expose their reality since He discerns all hidden things. He knows about their pride, their wickedness, and their hatred of the light. He knows about their jealousy towards what is true, their blasphemy, and their lack of faith and their evil intentions regarding Him. What the prophets have said about you is true. Nevertheless, now is not a time of judgment but rather it is time for salvation.

**The Lord teaches us here that we should not say all the things we know,
especially concerning the wickedness in others. Conversely, He asks us to seek
people to repent, and to return to the truth and so enjoy fellowship with God.**

❖ It is as though the Lord is saying, ‘Since the Father has sent Me to save the world, which is a good purpose, therefore, I do not judge anyone now. Indeed, I speak these words that lead to your salvation, and not those intended to condemn you.’

St. John Chrysostom

‘They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father.’ [27]

Because the devil had blinded them, and so they thought that the Lord was speaking about His physical father who lived in Galilee, and not about the Father who is His Father.

Then Jesus said to them,

**“ When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He,
and that I do nothing of Myself;
but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.” [28]**

Crucifying Him marks the peak of their wickedness. It is only then that they will realize that they have crucified the Lord of Glory. This reality will be revealed to them as a result of the signs that will occur during and after His crucifixion, as well as at His resurrection after that.

The burned offering was called ‘a raising.’ In many of the litanies of offering and sacrifices, the meat was lifted up and moved before the Lord. In the same manner, the Lord was lifted up on the Cross. During the Divine Liturgy, the instance when the priest chooses the lamb is called ‘the lifting of the lamb.’ The priest places the lamb (the Bread) in a cloth and lifts it up to his forehead as he prays, “Glory and honor; honor and glory to the Holy Trinity.” Sometimes, in the Holy Bible, ‘lift’ is used to indicate ‘to glorify.’ St. Peter the apostle uses it in this sense in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, “Therefore, being exalted to the right hand of God” (Acts 2:23). St. Paul

⁴⁹³ Hom 53 PG 59:311

⁴⁹⁴ Commentary on John, Book 19:159

also uses this word in the same sense, “Therefore, God also has highly exalted him...” (Phil 2:9). In the Old Testament, Joseph says, “Now within three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head to restore you to your place” (Gen 40:13).

The word ‘lift’ is also used to imply humiliation or death; as when Joseph said, “Within three days, Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree” (Gen 40:19).

Here, when the Lord says, “...**When you lift up the Son of Man**”, we find both meanings. From their perspective, they will lift Him up on the Cross in shame and embarrassment. However, from the perspective of the Father, He will raise and glorify Him; for through the Cross all the power of Satan is publicly exposed and denounced (Col. 2:15).

❖ **The Lord did not say, “You will know who I am,” but rather, “You will know that I am He.” In other words they would know that that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God. ‘He bears all things and I am not against that One ...for you will know my power and the oneness of thought with the Father.’ Actually, the Lord says, “...I do nothing of myself, but as my Father taught me, I speak these things” [28]. With these words, the Lord proclaims that in essence He is like the Father himself; He does not utter anything except that which is in the mind of the Father**⁴⁹⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ What does all this mean? It seems that all He has said is that they would know who He is after He undergoes all the sufferings. Undoubtedly, the Lord knew that He would reveal Himself to some of them such as those saints He had chosen and whom he foreknew before the foundation of the world. These would believe after the fact of His sufferings. ...He appears to say, “I will not be concerned with your enlightenment and will postpone that until my sufferings are over.” This does not mean that all who had heard Him would believe only after His passion because the Bible reports, a few verses later on, that “**As He spoke these words, many believed in Him**” [30]. However the Son of Man had not been lifted up as yet.

The ‘lifting up’ that the Lord is talking about here refers to His sufferings and not to His glorification. It refers to the Cross and not to heaven, yet He was also glorified there when He was hung on Cross⁴⁹⁶.

❖ These words were intended to comfort those who might despair on account of a sense of guilt. This is reinforced by hearing the Lord as He forgave those who put Him to death.

❖ “**...I do nothing of myself...**” [28]. What does this mean? That I am not alone for the Son is God and He proceeds from the Father. However, the Father is God but does not proceed from the Son. The Son is God proceeding from God; the Father is God but does not proceed from a God. The Son is light from light and the Father is light but not from light. The Son is an entity yet there is an entity from whom He proceeds. The Father is an entity but there is not an entity from whom He proceeds⁴⁹⁷.

❖ How did the Father talk with the Son? Did He talk to Him? According to the Lord’s words “**...as my Father taught me, I speak these things...**” [28].

When the Father taught the Son, did He use words such as those you use when you talk to your son?

How could the Father use words when He is talking to the Word?

⁴⁹⁵ Hom 53. PG 59:311

⁴⁹⁶ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 40:2

⁴⁹⁷ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 40:2

How many innumerable words would have to be used when talking with the One Word?

Does the Son bring His ear close to the Father's mouth?

All these are physical considerations ...discard them from your hearts, for God speaks to our hearts without a voice as we have indicated earlier. Therefore how much more does He speak to His Son?

The Father speaks to His Son in an intangible manner since He gave birth to the Son in a non-physical manner as well.

God did not teach His Son as though He was conceived without knowledge. Therefore 'taught' here conveys that He was born with full knowledge ...the Son has received knowledge from the Father from whom He has also received His being. This does not mean that He was born first and then received knowledge. Rather it conveys that as the Father at birth brought Him into being, so at birth too He gave Him knowledge. It is a natural simple fact since His being is not something different from His knowledge; both are One and the same⁴⁹⁸.

St. Augustine

**“And He who sent me is with me.
The Father has not left me alone,
for I always do things that please Him” [29].**

They seemed to possess the authority to kill Him. Yet this did not mean that the Father had abandoned Him. He is always with Him and they are never apart. What the Son does is pleasing to the Father; and so the Son was going to obey the Father and sacrifice Himself in order to save the world.

❖ So that they would not think that the Lord's words **“He who sent me”** indicates a deficiency in Him, He adds: **“He...is with me.”** While the words 'sent me' refer to God's plan, the words 'is with me' refer to His divinity. The Lord also clarifies that His actions on the Sabbath are pleasing to His Father as He says: **“...for I always do those things that please Him.”** Indeed the Lord Jesus Christ struggled intensely to reveal that He never acted contrary to the will of His Father.

St. John Chrysostom

“...He who sent Me is with Me” [29] ...this equality in being is **'permanent'**, and has no beginning or follow up ...indeed there is no beginning and no end. This is because the divine birth has no beginning in time since time itself has been created by the Only Son⁴⁹⁹.

St. Augustine

‘As He spoke these words, many believed in Him [30].

Whereas the Scribes and Pharisees stumbled due to His words and teachings, many of the people believed in Him. Just as the sun which dries up the mud is the same sun which melts wax, so were the Lord's words: the words which carried the aroma of life to the living, were the same which carried death to those who were dead.

The Greek word for 'believed' implies they believed the truth. However, it does not convey the firm and living faith; for in their hearts and minds they expected to see the Messiah in the terms of their material and political world: a Messiah who would liberate them from the Roman occupation and reinstate in the world the honor of their nation.

❖ Many of the Jews believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, yet it was not with full faith.

⁴⁹⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 40:5*

⁴⁹⁹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 40:6*

They believed the simple notions of the faith; but they chose what was convenient and comforting to them.

St. John Chrysostom.

4. Spiritual Freedom

**“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him,
“If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed”**” [31].

As the Lord’s teachings began to affect the hearts of those who believed, the Lord turned his attention from the proud Pharisees to the simple believers. They were beginners and He wanted to speak to them about inner liberty. He wanted to carry them, from mere belief that had no spiritual depth, to steadfastness in Him, as well as constant growth and fellowship with Him. They were weak in their faith, but as a Shepherd He carried them in the palms of His hands; tenderly and gently. He opened the door of true discipleship to them which provides constancy and steadfastness in His word. It is not sufficient to join His school, for they have to be steadfast.

Consequently, they would enjoy constant and unceasing growth. Many have appeared to be disciples and carried His name, but they have not persevered in His word. True discipleship to him involves constancy in Him and enjoying fellowship with Him. As long as we live, we need to belong to His school, and be serious about knowing and enjoying Him in a practical manner. Truly, we have accepted the divine Truth, yet we need to walk in His way. We need to love and hold on to Him and preserve Him within us.

❖ The Lord speaks these words in order to achieve the result that takes place after that: **“As He spoke these words, many believed in Him”** [30]. He spoke in the treasury where the poor came to obtain what they could and what was distributed to them. Therefore, many believed; but there were many who did not know Him. Among those who believed, there were those who remained steadfast in His teachings and these became His true disciples. For this reason, not many knew Him, since they did not become liberated when He delivered the Truth [33]. Indeed, only a few wake up and attain freedom.

Who are those who knew him, or those who lift Him up? According to the Lord’s words: ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He’ [refer to verse 28]. Now, no one is given milk to drink while He prepares himself to eat solid food (1 Cor. 3:2; Rom. 5:12). Such a person therefore says: “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2)⁵⁰⁰.

Origen

❖ In order to become a disciple, it is not enough to just come. You also need to continue (be steadfast). That is why the Lord did not say: ‘If you have heard My words’ or ‘if you come to My word,’ or ‘if you praise My word.’ Notice he says, “ If you abide (continue) in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” [31-31]. What do we say, my brothers? That we abide (persevere) in the Word of God.... Is that a hard thing to do or what?

If it is hard, then let us look forward at the great reward.

If it is not hard, then you would have been rewarded for nothing.

Let us abide (continue) in Him who abides in us.

⁵⁰⁰ *Commentary on John, Book 19:65-68*

If we do not abide in Him, we will fall. As for the Lord, if He does not abide in us, He will not have lost a resting place. Indeed, He excels as He rests in the Father who is One with Him and never abandons Him.

God forbid that man abides within his own self, for he loses himself by such an action. Therefore, **we abide in Him out of our need, whereas the Lord abides in us out of His mercy towards us**⁵⁰¹.

❖ What does “If we abide” convey? If you build on the rock...”(Matt 7:24)

How great this is, my brothers!...

What is the reward? **“You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”**

‘Bear and listen to Me, for you are aware that My voice is soft.

Help Me by listening quietly.’

What a glorious reward! **“You shall know the truth.”**

Now, someone might say, “What do I benefit by knowing the truth?” **“The truth shall make you free.”**

If the truth does not appeal to you, then let liberty have its appeal

In Latin, the word “liberate” carries two meanings. We are used to hearing this word applied to someone who is free, to indicate that he has escaped from some danger or surmounted some obstacle. However, the appropriate meaning for liberation is ‘to be safe’, ‘to be healed’ and to ‘be perfect.’ In this sense, to be liberated means to be free⁵⁰².

St. Augustine

Knowledge of the truth does not imply mere theoretical knowledge. Rather, it signifies having experienced and united with the truth.

❖ Notice that the Holy Bible does not state in other passages that those who unite with any object/someone and become one, get to know that other object with whom they have become associated and preoccupied. Before such a unity and fellowship existed, they did not know anything about that object/person until they learned some information from the descriptions offered to them.

For example, Adam said to Eve, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.” (Gen 2:23) Till then, Adam had not known his wife, but when he got attached to her, we are told: “Now Adam knew Eve his wife.” (Gen 4:1)

Those who find it hard to accept our use of the expression ‘Adam knew Eve his wife’ as an example of the manner in which we know God, let them consider the following: First, this is a great mystery (Eph 5:23). Then compare how the apostle uses the same words he used about the male and female to speak about the relationship between man and God. “Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot in one body with her? For ‘the two,’ he says, ‘shall become one flesh.’ But he who is joined with the Lord is one spirit with Him.” (1Cor 6:16). Consequently, he who adheres to a harlot knows a harlot, and he who adheres to a wife knows the wife. This applies even more truly to a person who adheres to God, and consequently gets to know God in a sacred manner. Since this is so, then the Pharisees neither knew the Father nor the Son⁵⁰³.

Origen

❖ ‘If you abide (continue) in the faith which has just begun in you now, you who believe, what will be your destination?’

⁵⁰¹ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 84:1*

⁵⁰² *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 84:2*

⁵⁰³ *Commentary on John, Book 19:22-24*

Look at the nature of the beginning and where it will lead you. You love the foundation and are concerned with the peak. Pray while you are at this simple, yet sublime height. For faith needs humility; yet, knowledge, immortality, and eternity demand sublimity and not earthly qualities. They demand heights, fulfillment, eternal stability and complete liberation from hostile attacks or fears of failure. These are great things which have their beginnings in faith but are often belittled.

When a building is constructed, those who have no experience often give little attention to the foundations. A great pit is dug and stones are thrown everywhere and in any way. There is no decoration or beauty. In spite of that, all that enchants us about the tree arises from the roots. Look at the roots and you will not be enchanted; look at the tree and you will be astonished by its beauty. Foolish person! What you admire grows out of what does not enchant you.

Similarly, the faith of believers appears to be a trivial matter and you have no scale by which to measure it.

Let us therefore listen to what faith has to offer. Let us consider its greatness as the Lord says in another passage, "...if you have faith as a mustard seed" (Matt. 17:20). What could be less significant than that? Yet what greater energy spreads from it? What would be smaller than that? Yet what could spread more powerfully from that seed? The Lord says **"If you abide in My word,"** that is if you believe. So where will that lead you? **"...You are My disciples indeed"** [31]. What benefit does this bring to them? **"...You shall know the truth"**⁵⁰⁴ [32].

St. Augustine

❖ **"If you abide in My word"**; these are words uttered by Him who reveals what is in their hearts. He knows that they have believed, but will not continue in their faith after that. So here the Lord is giving them a great promise that they will become His disciples. Some had already abandoned Him. So here He is referring to these as He says **"If you abide..."** For the others had heard and believed, yet they had abandoned Him and did not remain steadfast; "...many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more" (John 6:66)⁵⁰⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

**"And you shall know the truth
and the truth shall make you free" [32].**

The Lord is speaking, here, about knowledge that arises from practice and experience. These are powerful means that promote true discipleship to Him and result in inner freedom. As long as sin is found in man, then it has not yet been destroyed and he/she is unable to live in the spirit of an adopted child. In the baptismal waters, we have been granted that Spirit and can call the Father "our Father" (Rom. 8:15). Slavery to sin is the most dangerous form of slavery, and getting liberated from it is the greatest form of freedom.

A person who knows the truth and abides in it- in other words, who knows the Lord Jesus Christ and embraces Him- becomes liberated from the slavery of sin. He gets to have the thoughts of the Lord which are in harmony with the will of God. Consequently, such a person lives in perfect freedom according to the will of

⁵⁰⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 40:8*

⁵⁰⁵ *Homilies on St. John 54:1*

the Creator.

He is the Liberator who says “The spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has annointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives...” (Is. 61:1). On the Cross, the Lord has liberated us from our sins and their slavery. And with His resurrection, He has granted us His divine righteousness. Indeed, we are no longer slaves to sin. His holy word has liberated us from slavery to the literal word. Therefore we may live with the free spirit as children of God. As a result, we are able to experience the heavenly life as those who enter into the heavenly Jerusalem who is our free mother.

Had they not attained such knowledge while the Lord spoke to them? If they did not have knowledge, then how did they believe? **They believed in order to know and not because they already knew.** We believe so that we might know and not vice versa; for what we will get to know “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man...”(Is 64:4; 1 Cor 2:9). For what is faith other than believing what you have not seen as yet?⁵⁰⁶

❖ **“And you shall know the truth”**: the truth is unchangeable. The truth is bread that nourishes our minds and never fails. He changes those who eat Him while He does not undergo change within those who have been filled with Him. The truth is the Word of God...the only Son. This truth became incarnate for our sakes; He was to be born of the holy Virgin Mary and so fulfill the prophecy:” Truth shall spring out of the earth” (Ps 85:11). Therefore the truth, who was speaking to the Jews, was concealed in the flesh. However, He was not concealed in order to be denied but in order to delay His revelation. This was delayed so that he may suffer in the flesh: and He suffered in the flesh in order to liberate it from sin. Consequently, He appeared wholly weak physically; and His Divine glory was wholly concealed⁵⁰⁷.

St. Augustine

❖ **“And you shall know the truth”**: in other words, you shall know Me for I am the truth. All the Judaic teachings are symbols, but you will know the truth in Me, and this shall liberate you from your sins. The Lord did not say: ‘I will liberate you from slavery’ for He left it to them to reach this conclusion⁵⁰⁸.

St. John Chrysostom

**They answered Him,
“We are Abraham’s descendants,
and have never been I bondage to anyone,
how can you say, ‘ you will be made free?’” [33]**

It is clear that they did not comprehend the Lord’s teachings about ‘freedom.’ They considered his invitation to enjoy freedom an insult to them. For they were the children of Abraham who was free and who called God ‘his Friend’ (Is. 41:8). The Jews used to boast that they were descendants of that great father. Rabbi Akiba, who died in the year 135 A.D. approximately, says: [Even the poorest people in Israel are considered free people, even those who have lost all their belongings, for they are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The whole nation holds dearly to this special honor of being related to these great fathers and this had nothing to do with their economic status]. This is how the Jews felt at the time of the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁰⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 40:9*

⁵⁰⁷ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:1*

⁵⁰⁸ *Homilies on St. John 54:1*

They believed that their physical lineage from Abraham liberated them. However, we read of the foolish rich man in hell, pleading to Abraham his father and saying: 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.' (Lk. 16:24).

How did they dare say **“we have never been in bondage to anyone”** [33]? Were they not slaves to the Egyptians and liberated by Moses? Had they not been enslaved several times by neighboring nations in the era of the Judges? Were they not in bondage in Babel for seventy years? And finally, were they not paying taxes to the Roman Caesar?

People who are materialistic do not pay attention to inner bondage. Their whole concern is focused on physical lusts.

❖ This is what the Jews boasted about: 'We are Abraham's descendants'; 'we are Israelites.' Yet they never indicated or referred to their righteous deeds. That is why St. John shouted out, telling them: "... and do not think to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our Father" (Matt 3:9). Why did the Lord not embarrass them since they had often been in bondage under the Egyptians, Babylonians and many other nations? Because He did not seek to honor Himself, but sought their salvation and benefit. Therefore He was mounting His pressure with that goal in mind... He was not seeking to reveal that they were slaves to people; but that they were slaves to sin. This is dangerous slavery and no one can liberate them from that except God alone⁵⁰⁹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Every person - Jew, Greek, rich, or poor- having authority or public office-emperor or beggar- **“whoever commits sin is a slave of sin”** [34]. If people recognized their bondage, they would know how to attain freedom.

A person who is born free is transformed from a free person to a slave if he is captured by barbarians. If another person hears about that, feels compassion, and decides to use his money as a ransom, he goes to the barbarians and redeems the captive. In such a manner that man's liberty is restored as he is released from the injustice...

We ask the redeemed person: 'Have you erred?' He answers: 'I have.' Therefore do not boast about yourself that you have been redeemed. And you, who have redeemed him, do not boast. Indeed you should both turn to the true Redeemer, the Lord, who partially considers those who commit sins as slaves; while they are really considered dead ones.

What men should fear is the bondage that sin actually inflicts upon them. Why? Is it because they appear to be alive? Have these words been wrongly quoted: "... let the dead bury their own dead?" (Matt 8:22). Therefore all those under the bondage of sin are dead and enslaved to death: they are dead in their service and servants (slaves) in their death⁵¹⁰.

❖ Who is He who liberates from death and slavery other than He who is free and "adrift among the dead" (Ps 88:5)? Who is the One "adrift among the dead" other than the One who has no sin yet living among sinners? The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, our Savior, declares that: "The ruler of this world is coming and he has nothing in Me" (Jn 14:30). The (ruler of this world) catches those who are deceived and lured by him, and all those whom he urges to commit sin and he is the one who "has nothing in Me."

⁵⁰⁹ *Homilies on St. John 54:1*

⁵¹⁰ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 84:3*

Come, O Lord, come, O Savior. May the captive get to know you, may the one who has been captured escape to you, Be a Savior to him.!

When I was lost, the One who came in the flesh found me while Satan found nothing in Him. The ruler of this world found my body; but what kind of body did he find? He found a dead body that he could catch, crucify and kill!

O Deceiver, you have erred! The Lord cannot be deceived ... you found that He had a body that is susceptible to death, yet it was not a sinful body though in the form of one: "God...by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3). He was in the flesh, yet not in sinful flesh but "in the likeness of sinful flesh." With what purpose? : "...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit" (Rom 8:4).

No one who claims to be free continues to be a slave. May our spirits not remain in bondage, for He forgives our sins (debts) day by day⁵¹¹.

❖ Speaking about freedom in this life: where is the truth in their claim that they "have never been in bondage to anyone"? Was Joseph not sold (Gen 37:28)? Have the holy prophets not been captured and held in exile (2 Kings 24; Ex 1:1)? Another instance again, did not this nation, who used to make milk in Egypt, have to serve under vigorous rulers with hard bondage- not engaged in the gold or silver business- but in making bricks, and all manner of service in the field (Ex 1:14)? O you ungrateful nation, if you had never been enslaved then why was the Lord constantly reminding you that He has saved you from bondage (Ex 13:3; Deut 5:6)?...How did you pay the taxes to the Romans, and through that have set up a trap by which to catch the truth when you asked "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" You did so in order to accuse Him promptly of insulting the freedom of Abraham's descendants should He have condoned such payment. At the same time, should he have expressed opposition, you would have complained before the kings of the earth that He opposes the payment of taxes to them⁵¹².

St. Augustine

Jesus answered them,

❖ **Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin...** [34]

This awesome opening "Most assuredly I say to you" introduces a fearful proclamation. The Lord uses this very often when He launches on a matter of extreme seriousness. In this respect, He is different from the prophets who used the words: "This is what the Lord says." They did so because they were God's faithful servants; whereas the Lord Jesus Christ speaks for Himself and in his own right as the Son of God and says "**I say to you.**"

"**Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin**": there is no righteous man who has never sinned. Yet not everyone who commits a mistake is a slave of sin. By saying, '**whoever commits sin**'; the Lord refers to those who intend to commit sin and prefer it over the righteousness of God. These prefer the path of wickedness over the path of holiness (Jer. 44:16-17). By such behavior, they make a treaty with sin and accept it as their law: they allow sin to dictate their physical lusts and love of the world.

A person realizes his/her bondage to sin as he practices it. At first, one may believe that he is in control and has the right to obey or reject a certain sin. However, once sin has access, it holds the steering wheel directing the soul. Then a person gradually loses control over his will. It is as though sin is a drug which is hard to get rid of. Consequently, the person is manipulated according to the sin's whims. This leads him

⁵¹¹ *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 84:6*

⁵¹² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:2*

to do things he never imagined he would ever do. According to the Desert Fathers, when sin occupies a place in man's heart or mind and reigns over him, it exposes him to other sins. These may dominate him too, while leading him into a chain of sins which he cannot conquer on his own.

❖ **‘Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”**

He is a slave of sin: what a fate for man, and for sin!

Who would not tremble before these words? May our Lord and God grant us-you and I- to speak properly about such freedom. May we seek it, and avoid such bondage.

What a miserable bondage! When mankind suffers from wicked masters who demand us basically that we change our Master.

What does a slave of sin do? To whom does he bring his needs? To whom does he pray for salvation?...

Where does he escape from sin while he carries (his master) where ever he goes. The wicked conscience cannot escape from itself and there is no where to which he can go.

Indeed, a person cannot withdraw from himself because sin abides within him, he commits sin in order to attain some physical pleasure... The pleasure passes away while sin remains. What makes him rejoice transpires while the thorn remains after it. What a wicked bondage!

Let us all escape and go to the Lord. Let us voice our rebellion against sin to God who is our Savior. Let us pray that we get sold so that He may redeem us with His blood; for He says:” you have sold yourselves for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money” (Is 52:3). Without money on your side due to Me. This is what the Lord says because He has paid the price, not with money but with his own Blood. Otherwise we would have continued to be needy slaves⁵¹³.

St. Augustine

“And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever” [35].

The Lord is probably referring here to the exile of Ishmael and how he lost his inheritance (Gen. 21:10-14). A slave has no right to the inheritance of the family who has raised him; whereas the legal son has that right. The legal son has also the right to grant freedom to any slave of the family, and to deal with his inheritance in whatever manner he wishes.

The freedom of which the Jews boasted was a hallucination and an imaginary one, for they possessed neither inner nor outward freedom. This is the result of inner sin: it tricks its slaves into hallucinations of freedom. They get to believe that by living wickedly they are living a free and unrestrained existence. They imagine that they are demolishing what they believe to be bonds of goodness and faith. True freedom is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him, the believer sees the law of true love even if the price is self sacrifice for others. True freedom has divine potentials for the believer as he enjoys fellowship with the Divine Nature. No imaginations or materialistic transient factors can captivate him. On the contrary, the believer finds pleasure in harmonizing his will with that of God, his heavenly Father.

❖ If you wonder, why does the Lord mention ‘the house’ when he speaks and reminds them of their sins? Our answer would be: To demonstrate that just as the master holds authority in his own house, so does He have power and is Master of the creation. By saying **“..does not abide”**, the Lord refers to the lack of power to grant

⁵¹³ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:3-4*

privileges since the slave is not master of the house. However, the son is lord of the house and that is why He says “... a son abides forever”: as a metaphor borrowed from the context of human life. So that they would not say: ‘who are you’, the Lord said: “**Everything belongs to Me; I am the Son who lives in my Father’s house.**” By using the word ‘house’ the Lord reveals His power. In another passage, the Lord calls the kingdom His ‘Father’s house’: “In my Father’s house are many mansions...” (Jn 14:2). Because in this passage His teachings focus specifically on freedom and bondage, the Lord uses metaphors in order to inform them that they have no power by which they could enjoy freedom (nor to receive forgiveness.)⁵¹⁴

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Many sinners come into the church. That is why the Lord did not say: ‘the slave is not in the house’ but rather said “...a slave does not abide in the house forever.” Our hope, dear brothers, is that we become free through Him who is free. By liberating us, He will transform us into slaves. We were slaves to lust, but when we are liberated, **He transforms us into slaves of love.**

This is also echoed in the words of the apostle: “for you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” (Gal 5:13).

Therefore, a Christian person does not say: ‘I am free, I have been called to freedom. I was a slave and have been liberated and through my redemption I have become free to do whatever pleases me. No one can oppose my will since I am free...’

Do not damage your freedom by committing sin, rather, use it by not falling into sin. You become truly free only when you have a sanctified will.

You are free even though you are still a slave, liberated from sin, and serving righteousness. The apostle accordingly says: “for when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard of righteousness” (Rom 6:20,22)⁵¹⁵.

St. Augustine

“Therefore if the son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” [36].

St. John Chrysostom comments that in these verses the Son reveals his equality with the Father regarding authority; for only God justifies and condemns (Rom. 8:33,34). The Son has no sin and grants freedom from sin; and this is an authority that belongs to God only. The Lord, moreover, indicates that the liberty they think they possess is not a genuine one. However, the liberty that the Son grants is the real one: “...you shall be free indeed”⁵¹⁶.

❖ The Lord came in the flesh, that is in the likeness of the sinful flesh (Rom 8:3). But he did not come in the flesh of a sinner, for there was no sin whatsoever in Him. On that account, He became the offering for sin; for there was no sin in Him⁵¹⁷.

❖ Truly He grants us liberty from sin as He is fully entitled to do so. Accordingly, He says in the Psalms: “I am like a man who has no strength, adrift among the dead” (Ps 88:4,n5). Therefore He was the only free one who had no sin. When He says: “...the ruler of this world is coming...” the Lord is referring to Satan who will appear in the persons of the Jews who would persecute Him and “He has nothing in Me” (Jn 14:30,31). This is why no trace of sin will be found in the Lord as well as in any of those who are killed and are righteous martyrs. ‘Satan will have nothing in Me...I am

⁵¹⁴ *Homilies on St. John 54:2*

⁵¹⁵ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:8*

⁵¹⁶ *Homilies on St. John 54:2*

⁵¹⁷ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:5*

not paying the price of death due to my sins; but I die to fulfill My Father's will. In so doing I will tolerate death; even though I could have avoided suffering had I wished not to suffer.' In another context, the Lord explains: "...I have power to lay it (my life) down, and I have power to take it again" (Jn 10:18). Here we definitely have the words of Him who is free among the dead⁵¹⁸.

❖ Just as a doctor detests the disease of the patient and uses all the medical means to remove it and heal the suffering one; so does God work, through grace, in man in order to remove sin and liberate us.

❖ The apostle accordingly declares what we are about to acknowledge: "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man" (Rom 7:22). That is the moment when we become free as we rejoice in the word of God, because freedom brings joy. As long as you practice goodness out of fear, then the Lord will not be the reason for your joy. **May your joy arise from Him so that you may become free.** Do not fear punishment, but rather love righteousness. Do you still dislike righteousness? Then fear judgment in order to be granted the love of righteousness⁵¹⁹.

St. Augustine

**"I know that you are Abraham's descendants,
but you seek to kill Me,
because My word has no place in you" [37]**

It is good for the Jews to boast that they are descendants of Abraham, but why have they not followed in the spirit of their father in his faith and obedience to God? Why did they not confirm their lineage through their deeds rather than seeking to kill the Lord Jesus Christ? Since killing the innocent is considered a great crime, then how would you judge the act of killing the King of Kings? Abraham, in complete obedience and faith, offered his dear son as a burnt offering to God. Here we find them in total rebellion as they seek the death of the dear Son of God!

They boast of their lineage from Abraham who was given the promise to be the father of numerous nations. Although the time for the fulfillment of the promise had come; and that the Lord had come from Abraham's lineage to gather all Abraham's spiritual children; yet here we find the Jews seeking to kill Him. The mystery behind their rebellion against the truth; and their lack of pleasure in the blessings which their father Abraham enjoyed, is declared here in the Lord's words: **"...because My word has no place in you."** They did not leave a place in their hearts for the words of the Lord who is himself the truth. Due to the envy and hate that filled their hearts, there was no possibility for truth to enter.

When a person shuts the doors of his heart with physical lust and love of the world, then there is no place for truth to enter and fill him. Truth does not force His way in when He is not welcomed. When He is welcomed, he enters as though into His house, takes charge of the steering wheel in order to direct all the motions of the heart, thought, feelings, and senses. Consequently, such a person is transformed through divine grace into a spiritual being led by the Spirit of God.

If you boast on account of your lineage from Abraham, then you need to promote yourselves and live in the same manner as he did. The Lord did not say "you have no place for my words" but He said **"My word has no place in you"** as He was indicating the sublimity of his teachings. In spite of all that, this was not the reason why they wanted to kill him. They wanted to kill him because they did not honor or listen to him with the intention of learning⁵²⁰.

⁵¹⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:7*

⁵¹⁹ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:10*

⁵²⁰ *Hom 54.PG 59:317-318*

Origen offers a distinction between ‘descendants’ and ‘children’ from a literal point of view. Descendants or seeds are put into a woman and she may or may not give birth to a child. This implies that all children are either descendants or seeds, but not all are children. Therefore all those who live in the manner of Abraham are his descendants and children. Whereas those who are his children according to the flesh, but do not walk in his ways, are only descendants and not his true children. Based on that, **Origen** says that if there is a person who is neither Abraham’s child nor his descendant, then he is not to be blamed, like them, if he is a sinner. This is because he has not had the chance to be born of the seed of a righteous man and grow to be like his father. As for those who are Abraham’s descendants, they should have been counted as his children and they should have walked in their father’s footsteps. Though they are descendants yet they are not true children of Abraham since they do not live according to the ways of their father⁵²¹.

Origen also states: **[Abraham became Abraham although he is not an offspring of Abraham (he did not conceive himself) but an offspring from those who came before him. Similarly, it is possible for a person, who sows good seeds in himself, to become another Abraham in spite of not being of his offspring in any way. Yet he possesses the capacity to sow seeds like Abraham⁵²²].**

The people of Israel lived in the same manner as the Amorites, Hittites, and idol worshippers. Therefore the Bible describes them saying: ‘your father was an Amorite and you mother a Hittite’ (Ezk 16:3). Although they were an offspring of Abraham and descended from Sarah; yet they were considered neither Abraham’s nor Sarah’s children.

❖ This clearly teaches us that we need to interpret the whole story of Abraham symbolically. Besides we need to adopt his ways in a spiritual manner from the very start: “get out of your country, from your kindred, and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.”(Gen 12:1). These words are said to everyone who wishes to be God’s child...and the Lord God who appeared to Abraham will appear to us and promise to grant us the land around the high Terebinth tree as an inheritance to our spiritual descendants (Gen 12:6).

Moreover, he who understands the commandment: “must do the works of Abraham”, must build an altar for God who will appear to us where the high Terebinth tree is. From there Abraham had to travel to the mountain, that mountain lies west of Bethel which means “the house of God.” It is for this reason that he set up his tent in Bethel that lies on the west; and Ai lies on the east- ‘Ai’ meaning feasts...

If you are the children of Isaac, then live in the ways of Isaac. The same applies to Jacob as well as to all the holy fathers. Conversely, every person who commits sin is considered to be a child of Satan according to the flesh; since “... he who sins is of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8)...

That is why we say that every person will return to his fathers upon departing from this life. At the time of departure, it will be imperative to say, not only to Abraham but to all mankind: “Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers...” (Gen 16:15). However, ‘...in peace’ is not said to everyone as it applies only to the saints who have retained their righteousness to a good old age. It is said to those who have progressed and enjoyed a long spiritual journey; for ‘understanding comes with old age in mankind’ and ‘the silver- head is a crown of glory’(Prov. 16:31), and an ornament for

⁵²¹ *Commentary on John, Book 20:3 etc*

⁵²² *Commentary on John, Book 20:16*

the truly righteous elders⁵²³.

Origen

❖ **“I know that you are Abraham’s descendants , but you seek to kill me, because My word has no place in you.”**.. I know that you are Abraham’s descendants according to your physical origins but not according to a believing heart. If you had received My words, they would have arrested you, and then you would have been caught like fish that is caught in the net of faith. Then what is the meaning of **“..has no place in you”**? It has no place in your hearts that are unwilling to receive them. This is how the word of God works; and this is how it should be with believers: it is like what a fishing rod is to fish. It picks the fish when the fish takes it. No harm touches those who are caught for they are caught to be redeemed and not to be destroyed... as for those others, they have inherited the form of the flesh yet they have become separated from Abraham because they rejected to walk in his faith as his true children⁵²⁴.

St. Augustine

5- Adopted Children of God or Adopted Children of Satan

“I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father”[38].

As the Jews boasted to be children of Abraham and his descendants according to the flesh; the Lord Jesus Christ presented himself to them as the Son of God in nature. He wished them to bond with Him so that they might enjoy adoption as children of God through grace; rather than what has happened to them as adopted children of Satan. They wished to kill Him although He is the Son of God according to nature. Through their deeds and plots they confirmed their acceptance to be adopted children of Satan. The words of the Lord Jesus Christ are the eternal truth which He sees in the bosom of His father, for He is the Word of God.

There are two families that will never unite: God with his children and Satan with his children. No one can belong to the two families at the same time. By accepting one you necessarily resist the other even though the resistance may not be apparent. The Lord offers what He hears from the Father as well as what He sees. Because He resides in the Father, He sees Him. What the prophets utter are things they have heard from God or have received through visions. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He is the Divine Word and the Truth Himself.

❖ Through my words I proclaim the Father in truth. That is how you need to go about your work too. For I have the same essence as the Father, and the same truth as well⁵²⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Yet Abraham was also born among mankind and there were many who came before and after him. Listen to the voice of the Father to his Son:” I conceived you before Lucifer ever was” (Ps 15:3 Vulgate). He has been born who gives light to all, ever before Lucifer existed... Why is Lucifer mentioned. Because when he was enlightened, he shed light. And why did he become darkened? Because he did not abide in the truth (Jn 8:44).

❖ **“I speak what I have seen with My Father and you do what you have seen**

⁵²³ *Commentary on John, Book 20:67 etc*

⁵²⁴ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:1*

⁵²⁵ *Hom 54. PG 59:318*

with your father' [38]. I see the truth and I utter the truth for I am the truth. When the Lord speaks the truth which He sees with the Father, **He is actually seeing Himself speaking of what He sees with the Father:** For He is the Word, and the Word was with God (Jn 1:1). The evil which these people were doing, and which the Lord condemned and resented, where had they seen it? They saw it with their father ... here, the Lord is speaking of another father which they had. This was a father who had neither conceived nor created them to become mankind. Yet they were his children on account of their wickedness and not on account of their humanity. They were his children because they followed and imitated him and not because they had been created by him⁵²⁶.

St. Augustine

**They answered and said to Him:
"Abraham is our father."**

Jesus said to them:

"If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham" [39]

The son bears the nature of the father and naturally imitates him. Therefore it would have been appropriate for them to bear Abraham's faith, obedience, and righteousness if they were truly his children. They would not have sought to kill the One who speaks the truth- this is something Abraham would never have done. In this manner they deprived themselves of belonging to his spiritual lineage.

❖ The Lord here deals with their intention to kill. He mentions Abraham as He desires to draw them away from their preoccupation with being descendants of Abraham; and to tear away their haughtiness. He desires to motivate them to be more concerned with the hope of salvation. They can find salvation neither in Abraham nor in their natural bond with him; but rather in possessing his (righteous) will. This was the whole reason for their inability to come to the Lord: they thought that being Abraham's descendants was enough to secure their salvation⁵²⁷.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ **They answered and said to him: "Abraham is our father"[39].** It is as though they were saying: "what are you saying against Abraham? Or "If you dare, find fault with Abraham." It is not that the Lord is unable to dare and to find fault in Abraham; but rather that Abraham was not the person that the Lord would want to find fault with, for he would praise him. However, these scribes and Pharisees desired to defy Him so that He would speak wickedly of Abraham. This would give them the chance to fulfill their intention⁵²⁸.

St. Augustine

**"But now you seek to kill Me,
a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God.
Abraham did not do this"[40].**

❖ Those seeking to kill him, seek to kill a human being. Yet even though they have killed him; the God (the Divinity) cannot be killed. They wanted to kill Him and yet could not. So they conspired against Him as they would against a human being. They could not comprehend that the One they were conspiring against is God. No one would want to continue conspiring against Him once he is convinced that the One he

⁵²⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:2*

⁵²⁷ *Homilies on St. John 54:2*

⁵²⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:3*

is targeting is God⁵²⁹.

❖ They would probably kill the body of the Word, but it is clear that they could go no further after that. Therefore we should not fear those who kill the body but are unable to do further harm. We should not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul which is consecrated to the Word⁵³⁰.

❖ May these words be applicable to all those who have come after the Lord, as well as to those who went before Him: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” (Gal 2:20). We also need to focus on the Lord’s words: “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt 22:32). This probably indicates that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are alive because they too have been buried but are risen with the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 2:12; Rom 6:4). However, this did not happen, by any means, at the time when Christ was physically buried, or at the time He arose in the body. Yet, this is only our own observation and comment on the words: “Abraham did not do this” [41]⁵³¹.

Origen

❖ ‘Abraham was not a murderer. I say this for I am the God of Abraham and when I say this I am saying the truth...I know that you are Abraham’s descendants.’ The Lord did not deny their lineage but He condemned their deeds⁵³².

❖ We come from other nations, yet if we emulate Him, we will become Abraham’s children. Listen to the apostle’s words: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made.” He does not say ‘And to his seeds’ as though speaking of many; but as of One: “...and to your Seed, who is Christ...and if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:16,29). We have become Abraham’s descendants; and God has made us heirs with him. He has stripped the inheritance away from the earlier heirs, and He has adopted those who have come after them. The Lord has cut off the natural branches that have become dry on the olive tree. This tree had its origins in the patriarch, and the humble and wild olive tree has been grafted into it (Rom 11:17)⁵³³.

St. Augustine

❖ **St. Augustine** comments on the Lord’s words and says: St. John the Baptist attacked the haughtiness of the Jews who had come to him. They boasted that they were descendants of Abraham, yet they did not follow his example. He clearly states that “God is able to raise children to Abraham out of these stones” (Matt 3:7-9). [If you do not bear fruit, which indicates repentance, then do not boast of such lineage. God can condemn you without denying there are children of Abraham: they are those who imitate him in his faith and are therefore his children. “God is able to raise up children to Abraham out of these stones”- we are such children. Through our fathers we had become stones as we had taken stones to be our god and had worshipped them. From these stones, God has created a family for Abraham⁵³⁴].

“You do the deeds of your father.”

Then they said to Him, “We were not born of fornication, we have one Father- God” [41].

The Lord revealed a truth hidden from them: by their actual deeds they had become

⁵²⁹ *Commentary on John, Book 20:82-82*

⁵³⁰ *Commentary on John, Book 20:81-82*

⁵³¹ *Commentary on John, Book 20:93*

⁵³² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:3*

⁵³³ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:5*

⁵³⁴ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:5*

adopted children of Satan who is a murderer. Ever since the beginning, he did not abide in the truth [44].

The Jews may have intended, by these words, to indicate that they were not descendants of Ishmael who was the son of the servant; whereas they came from the lineage of Isaac the son of Sarah, the free woman. Besides, they claimed they did not descend from Moab or Edom who were born out of a sinful relationship between Noah and his two daughters.

❖ The matter does not end with the reference to the branch and the stone; but with the indication that mankind has sinned even more through their choice of Satan to be their father, while he is the destroyer of souls. That is why the Lord reprimanded them saying: **“You do the deeds of your father”**, pointing to Satan who has become the father of mankind through deceit and not by nature. Just as Paul became the father of the Corinthians through his good teachings, so has Satan become called the father of those who willingly consent to obey him (Ps 50:18)⁵³⁵..

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ When we sin, we acknowledge that we have not yet stripped away our birth from Satan; even though we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. That explains why the Lord told the Jews who had believed: **“You do the deeds of your father.”** The word **‘father’** here refers to Satan; and the Lord uses it again in this sense when He says: **“You are of your father the devil”** [44].

❖ These words indicate clearly that a person is not a child of Satan as a fruit of creation. Moreover, we cannot consider that any person is God’s child as he has been created by Him.

It is also clear that a person who was previously known as a child of Satan can become a child of God. This is clear in St. Matthew’s Gospel as he reports the Lord’s words: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and persecute you; **that you maybe sons of your Father in heaven**” (Matt 5:43-45)⁵³⁶.

❖ Since all who abide in Him do not commit sin, then those who commit sin do not abide in the Son. And since all those who commit sin do not see Him, then he who sees Him does not sin⁵³⁷.

❖ The person who is born of God does not sin. It is true that it is not written that the person born of Satan does not act righteously; but rather that a person who acts wickedly comes from Satan⁵³⁸.

❖ Some claim that there are some creatures who come from God, and that they are in no way born of God. These creatures are definitely of a lower rank in the world in contrast to those considered to be born of God⁵³⁹.

❖ He who is born of God does not commit sin for the Seed of God abides in him. Through the power of this Seed within him, the feature of inability to sin appears in him. At the end of St. John’s Epistle we read these words: “We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him” (1Jn 5:18).

❖ Those who are Abraham’s children do the deeds of Abraham. The first thing he did

⁵³⁵ Essay 7:13

⁵³⁶ Commentary on John, Book 20:106

⁵³⁷ Commentary on John, Book 20:109

⁵³⁸ Commentary on John, Book 20:114

⁵³⁹ Commentary on John, Book 20: 118

was to leave his land, his family, and his father's house; and he departed to the land which God would show him. This is why the Lord reprimanded the Jews and faced them with the fact that they were not Abraham's children: they had not left their father's house and they were still loyal to the evil father and doing the deeds of that father⁵⁴⁰.

❖ When the Lord said that God is His Father (Jn 5:18), He did not indicate a man as His father. Therefore the Jews responded: **"We were not born of fornication"** as they opposed Him. They also added: **"We have one Father- God" [41]**. It is as though they were telling Him: 'We are the ones who have one father-God- whereas you do not since you claim that you were born of a Virgin, and therefore were born of adultery/fornication.

You boast that you were born of a Virgin by claiming that God alone is Your Father. We are the ones who know God as our Father yet we do not deny that we have a human father too⁵⁴¹.

Origen

❖ The Jews realized that the Lord was not talking about their physical lineage from Abraham. They knew He was referring to their deeds, and they were aware of the significance of His words. Wickedness entails deviation from God and it consequently leads to spiritual fornication. They therefore stopped talking about their lineage since they had failed to follow Abraham's example. That is why they said: **"We were not born of fornication, we have one Father- God" [41]**.

❖ 'You claim that God is your Father, therefore consider Me as your brother at least.' At the same time, the Lord repeats words He has often said to offer a motive to those who have an alert heart: **"I proceeded forth and came from God, nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me"**... The Lord Jesus Christ came from God and is equal to Him, the only Son, and the Word of the Father. He came to us for the Word became incarnate in order to dwell among us. His coming indicated His human form as well as His divinity. He enables us to progress through that Divinity which is in the flesh. Had He not become incarnate in order to enable us to progress, we would never have received Him who is the eternal One⁵⁴².

❖ The Lord says: 'Why do you not understand My words? Because you are unable to hear them'... Why are they unable to listen other than because they refuse to walk uprightly by believing in Him? Why was that? Because "You are of your father, the devil." Until when will you continue to speak about a father? Until when will you continue to change fathers- your father is Abraham at one time, then it is God at another. Listen to the Son and He will tell you whose children you are: **"You are of your father the devil"**⁵⁴³.

❖ Why are you his children? Due to your lusts and not because you were born of the devil.

What are his lusts? **"He was a murderer from the beginning."** This statement clarifies the rest of the Lord's words: **"...the desires of your father you want to do....You want to kill Me because I am the One who informs you of the truth."** The devil has evil intentions towards man and seeks to kill him. Because of his wicked plans, he took the form of a snake and enticed the woman, and through her he injected his poison into mankind. Both Adam and Eve died because they listened to

⁵⁴⁰ Commentary on John, Book 20:126

⁵⁴¹ Commentary on John, Book 20:130

⁵⁴² St. Augustine: On the Gospel of John, tractate 42:8

⁵⁴³ St. Augustine: on the Gospel of St. John, tractate 49:9

the devil (Gen 3:1). Had they not listened to him, they would both have listened to God; for it was imperative for man to obey the Creator and not the Deceiver... Satan is called the 'murderer' not in the sense of someone armed with a sword and cloaked in an armor. Rather, in the sense of someone who approached man and sowed his wicked suggestions and killed him.

Therefore do not imagine that you are not a murderer too when you invite your brother to wickedness, By coaxing him to behave wickedly, you are actually killing him. So that you may know what you are doing, listen to the words of the Psalmist: '...the sons of men...whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword' (Ps 57:4).

Indeed, you fulfill the desires of your father for you are unable to walk according to the Spirit; and therefore are driven wildly towards the flesh.

“He was a murderer from the beginning”: at least ever since the beginning of human life.

Ever since then the possibility of killing people holds true. Only since man was created did it become possible to kill man; since before that time man had not been created as yet....

How did he get to be a murderer? Because **‘he does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.’**[44].

So he knew the truth but he stumbled because he did not abide in it. And why did he not abide in the truth? Because the truth is not in him in the same manner that it is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. For in the Lord the truth abides in a manner that makes Him the Truth itself. Had Satan abided in the truth, he would have abided in the Lord Jesus Christ. But he did not because there is no truth in him⁵⁴⁴.

St. Augustine

Jesus said to them,

“If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me” [42].

They believed they were God's children, and had not committed the crime of fornication. Although they did not worship idols, yet, by rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ and resisting Him, they testified to the opposite of that. They attempted to defend their status as God's children, yet they had to admit that the Jewish nation, as a mother, had lost her union with God. On account of sin, they had become divorced: Thus says the Lord: “Where is the certificate of your mother's divorce whom I have put away...For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions your mother has been put away” (Is 50:1). What had been told to their fathers at the time of Isaiah is being told them again here on account of their bondage to sin.

The meaning of the Lord's words: “...**for I proceeded forth and came from God...**” could be interpreted in two ways due to the place of the joining word used in the Greek text: this joining word could convey 'estrangement' or 'accompaniment' in respect of the other being; or proceeding from inside while remaining with the Essence. In the correct Greek writings, however, the meaning is: **the Word came without essentially being separated from the Father who is the Essence. Therefore the coming of the Lord into our world did not isolate Him from that same and one divine Essence.**

❖ From every aspect, it is evident that the Lord Jesus Christ does not oppose God.

⁵⁴⁴ St. Augustine: on the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:10-11

Moreover the reason for their unbelief is not a result of the Lord's teaching but a result of their estrangement from God. The Lord told them He had not committed any sin and that He came from God. Moreover, He told them that He was sent into the world by God and that He spoke the truth...after all that, they still did not believe in Him. Clearly, they did not believe because they were corporeal⁵⁴⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The Lord Jesus Christ proceeded from God, and after He left He still continued to abide in Him⁵⁴⁶.

❖ It is clear that His accusers thought that the Father had a physical home; and that the Son came to this life just by moving from one tangible place to another. They did not understand that the change was from one condition into another in the sense that we accept⁵⁴⁷.

Origen

❖ The One who proceeds from the Father and comes from God cannot be charged except with what is worthy of God⁵⁴⁸.

St. Ambrose

“Why do you not understand My speech?

Because you are not able to listen to My word”[43].

A person who is unable to hear the word of the Lord, may eventually enjoy this ability at some other time. Sometimes the inability to hear is because that person's hearing has not yet been healed by the Word who says to the deaf: “Be opened” (Mk7:37)⁵⁴⁹. Their hearts needed to hear the words of the Lord in order to tear away their haughtiness and hypocrisy, and to destroy the corruption within their souls. They needed to hear His words in order to sanctify their will. However, they insisted on not departing from evil. Therefore the words of the Lord were mysterious and meaningless to them. To their ears, it all sounded so impractical.

❖ The inability to listen is not a natural outcome which cannot be healed⁵⁵⁰.

❖ Lying indicates an opponent to the One saying: “I am the truth” (Jn 14:6). Lies oppose the Lord Jesus Christ. Such an opponent has the devil as his father who is a devil and a liar himself⁵⁵¹.

Origen

**“You are of your father the devil,
and the desires of your father you want to do.**

He was a murderer from the beginning

And does not stand in the truth,

Because there is no truth in him.

When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources

For he is a liar and the father of it” [44].

Had they not insisted on resisting Him in their conversation with Him, the Lord would not have told them **“You are of your father the devil.”** He had no desire to hurt anyone's feelings. However, their insistence on lying, on being rebellious, and on

⁵⁴⁵ Hom 54.PG 59:319-320

⁵⁴⁶ Commentary on John, Book 20:156

⁵⁴⁷ Commentary on John, Book 20:159

⁵⁴⁸ Of the Holy Spirit, Book 1:16:107

⁵⁴⁹ Commentary on John, Book 20:164

⁵⁵⁰ Commentary on John, Book 20:165

⁵⁵¹ Commentary on John, Book 20:173

killing the truth made Him face them openly with their real status as children of Satan. He hoped His words would bring them to face their own reality and therefore motivate them to retreat from their wickedness.

The words “...**you want**” in Greek convey continuous insistence in executing what they wanted. This is a feature of the enemy of goodness. The devil insists on his wickedness and obstinately persists in fighting the truth to the end. He pours this feature into all those who accept him as their father. In contrast, we find that the children of God possess the spirit of meekness and obedience.

These Jews were not the children of righteousness since they hated the dear Son and sought to kill Him. They are by definition the children of Satan. The world is divided into two teams: one represents the kingdom of God; and the other belongs to the kingdom of Satan.

Satan works within the sons of disobedience (Eph 2:2). These are also known as descendants (seeds) of the serpent (Gen 3:15); and the sons of the wicked one (Matt 13:38). They share with Satan his wicked features, bear his image, obey his laws, and emulate him.

This is a very serious accusation and hard for any person to accept. How much harder would it be when it is directed to a people who believed they were the only nation who worshipped God, and who had great pride as they were labeled as ‘God’s people’? That is why the Lord presented a practical proof that His words were true: “...**the desires of your father you want to do.**” It is as though He was telling them: ‘you give Satan great joy as you respond to his temptations and achieve his goals through you.’ The most important features of Satan are: murderer as he opposes God who is ‘love’, and liar as he resists the truth. Here they were doing just these two things: they were seeking to kill the Son of God as well as rejecting and resisting the truth. Consequently, they became murderers and liars; the children of the father of liars.

He is a murderer from the beginning for he deceived Eve through the serpent; and deceived Adam through Eve. He destroyed their lives and killed them spiritually and physically. Then death entered into the world and instilled in Cain a murderous spirit. Consequently, he killed his brother Abel. This is consistent with the thought of the Jews themselves for Sohar Kadash speaks of the wicked who are called ‘the children of the old serpent that killed Adam and his seed.’

“**Satan speaks from his own resources...**”, in other words, he speaks from the lies within him. That is how he spoke through the serpent and managed to deceive Eve and removed her away from the truth. When a person utters a lie, he is really uttering what belongs to Satan and so becomes Satan’s mouthpiece.

❖ The Lord dismissed them from their lineage to Abraham. But then they dared to boast of a greater claim and said: “...We have one Father- God...” Therefore the Lord hit them hard by telling them that they were born of the devil and not of Abraham [44].

❖ People use lies not as an object worthy of them but as a foreign tool⁵⁵².

St. John Chrysostom

❖ A good tree cannot produce bad fruit. Neither can a bad tree produce good fruit⁵⁵³.

St. Jerome

⁵⁵² Hom 54.PG 59:319

⁵⁵³ Against Jovinianus, 2:18

❖ Not everyone who utters a lie is a father of liars. If you have received an untrue message from a person and repeated that message then you are really uttering a lie. However, you are not the father of that lie since you have received it from someone else. In Satan's case, he is a liar himself as he gives birth to untrue words and therefore they are words that he has not received from someone. Just as the Father gave birth to Truth as His Son; so has Satan given birth, after his fall, to untruthfulness as his own child....Therefore withdraw yourself from the father of lies; and hurry to the Father of Truth: embrace Him for the Truth will grant you the joy of freedom⁵⁵⁴.

St. Augustine

❖ **Satan is the first source of sin and the father of the wicked.** This is not our statement; for these are God's words: "For the devil has sinned from the beginning..." (1Jn3:8; Jn 8:44)...However, he was not forced to sin but, as it were, he had a natural inclination to sin. Otherwise the weakness of sinfulness would have bounced back to his Creator as well. It is of his own free will that Satan became accepting of this name, and brought it upon himself through his own deeds. He was the archangel; but he became known as Satan due to his deceptive ways. He was God's good servant; but then became rightly called a 'devil' which means 'the opponent.'

This is not our personal teaching, but they are drawn from Ezekial the prophet. He was inspired to cry and mourn over Satan, and said: "You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden (read Ezekial 28:12-17). After a number of verses, Ezekial goes on to say: "You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you."

Ezekial rightly says "...till iniquity was found in you...", for Satan brought it to himself and so evil did not come upon him from outside. The prophet promptly indicates the cause by saying: "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor...by the multitude of your iniquities ...I turned you to ashes upon the earth." These words agree with the Lord's words in the Gospel: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Lk 10:18).

Here you see how the Old and the New Testaments agree together!

When Satan was exiled, he attracted many to him. He sows lust into the hearts of those who listen to him as he is the source of whoring, adultery, and all kinds of evil. Because of him, our father disobeyed and suffered exile. Paradise with its amazing fruit was transformed into the earth producing thorns⁵⁵⁵.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

❖ The Lord's words here refer to all those who lie. Lies on the lips of any liar are the product of what is within him- that is from the lies within him. In addition, the Lord's words "...he is the father of it" indicate the fact that anyone whose mouth utters lies is a father of the lies which he has uttered⁵⁵⁶.

❖ It is not contradictory to confirm that the desires of Satan consist of murder, inflicting injustice, and greed. In fact, he sows similar desires in his children. Moreover, it is not unkind to say that his desires are unclean acts that are in stark conflict with purity. It is not hard to believe that Satan's desires arouse in his children

⁵⁵⁴ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of st John, tractate 42:13*

⁵⁵⁵ *Essay 2:4*

⁵⁵⁶ *Commentary on John, Book 20:175*

impure matters⁵⁵⁷.

❖ We know that anyone who wishes to practice Satan's lusts cannot have God as his father; for he has become Satan's child. He changes in accordance to the wicked desires that Satan wishes to fulfill. Indeed, that person becomes transformed into the image of the wicked father. He becomes a product of Satan: an earthly person with Satan's brand; because the first man was a product of the earth (1Cor 15:47-49)⁵⁵⁸.

❖ If we do the deeds of God and desire to do His will, then we are God's children. But if we do the deeds of Satan, and are eager to follow his lusts, then we come from Satan our father. On that account, we need to be alert to what we do as well as what we desire. Indeed, **the desire to experience Satan's lusts is enough to brand us as his children**⁵⁵⁹.

❖ Adam and Eve died instantly on the day they ate of the forbidden tree. No one else other than Satan the murderer was responsible for their death. He deceived Eve through the serpent, and Eve gave her husband from the tree and he ate (Gen 3:1-6)⁵⁶⁰.

❖ He is rightly called a murderer; not because he has killed certain people, but because he has killed the whole human race: "for in Adam all die" (1 Cor 15:22)⁵⁶¹.

❖ On the one hand, the murderer killed us. On the other hand, through God's grace, we have been buried with the Lord Jesus Christ and have risen with Him: "...But just as Christ was raised...even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4)⁵⁶².

❖ Now the murderer rules over those who are perishing and he governs the dead. However, he cannot rule over anyone who is alive⁵⁶³.

❖ God encouraged Moses to abide in the truth and said to him: "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock" (Ex 33:21). Therefore the Rock is the Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor 10:4). The Lord also says: "I am the truth" (Jn 14:6). Thus the words "stand on the rock" and "stand on the truth" are synonymous. A person can achieve that only after going through many trials and difficulties⁵⁶⁴.

❖ If there is someone who has never told a lie and who has remained steadfast in the truth, then he is not a human being: for the Lord speaks to such a one and to all those like him saying: "I said: You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High" (Ps82:6)...the rest of the verse is not added in this context as it says: "But you shall die like men" (Ps 82:7).

❖ If some have not remained steadfast in the truth, then clearly Satan the murderer has not remained in the truth since the beginning...and the reason given for that is **"because there is no truth in him."** As for why there is no truth in him, it is the fact that he is a deceiver who accepts to lie. Indeed, he has deceived himself through himself. On that account, he is considered the most wicked of all. Others have been deceived through him, whereas he created deception out of himself⁵⁶⁵.

❖ Someone may say that the statement "there is no truth in him" indicates that the one who arouses wars against the Lord has no share in the fellowship with Him. Another may say that because there is no truth whatsoever in Satan, he is deceived in every way. The reason for that is that he is a devil, wicked, and the most evil among

⁵⁵⁷ Commentary on John, Book 20:177

⁵⁵⁸ Commentary on John, Book 20:181

⁵⁵⁹ Commentary on John, Book 20:193-194

⁵⁶⁰ Commentary on John, Book 20: 221

⁵⁶¹ Commentary on John, Book 20:224

⁵⁶² Commentary on John, Book 20:226

⁵⁶³ Commentary on John, Book 20:227

⁵⁶⁴ Commentary on John, Book 20:240

⁵⁶⁵ Commentary on John, Book 20:242-244

those who commit sin.

Among the multitudes of sinners, some may discern some truth in the middle of numerous wrong issues. However, there is no particle of truth in Satan.

A third party may agree with the others and claim that there could not be a reasoning being who adheres to an incorrect opinion on every issue; or who always rejects the truth even that related to minor matters. They believe that when Satan thinks he would at least adhere to a correct opinion just as a reasoning being would do. Such ideas are based on the belief that Satan is a human being with a body, etc....⁵⁶⁶

❖ We need to understand this statement: “(he) does not stand in the truth...”: this does not indicate a specific kind of nature or that it was impossible for him to abide in the truth⁵⁶⁷.

Origen

❖ Every person who is from God is considered to be our brother. As for the person who refuses to share in doing good of his own free will, then he is considered as one who sows evil. He consequently becomes ‘the father of liars’ (Jn 8:44); for he has prepared to fight all those who have chosen to live in a godly manner⁵⁶⁸.

St. Gregory of Nicea

❖ Every person needs to pay great attention so as not to be disarmed by ‘lies’; for a **liar cannot be united with God.**

A liar is alienated from God. The Holy Bible states that a liar proceeds from the devil who “is a liar and the father of it” (Jn 8:44).

That is why Satan has been called the father of liars; whereas the Truth is God. The Lord Himself declares: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6).

Do you not see, therefore, how we could be estranged from God on account of lying; and with whom we become united (through lies)?! Since this is so, we need to love truth with all our strength and zeal. This will enable us to fulfill our real desire to be saved. We also need to guard ourselves against all lies so that they do not separate us from the truth and life⁵⁶⁹.

Fr Dorotheous

“But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me” [45]

When the **Truth** came to them, they did not listen. These verses inform us that “Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for the truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. So truth fails...” (Is 59:14-15). The Bible also tells us that “There are those who rebel against the light; they do not know its ways nor abide in its paths” (Job 24:13).

❖ They seem to have based their belief on what is tangible when the Lord worked miracles. However, they did not believe on account of His deep teachings⁵⁷⁰.

Origen

❖ The speaker here considers himself to be a young child standing before God. He has chosen the Almighty to be his Father and Mother. God is his Father since He is

⁵⁶⁶ *Commentary on John, Book 20:248-250*

⁵⁶⁷ *Commentary on John, Book 20:252*

⁵⁶⁸ *Song of Solomon by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nicea- translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, 1993; Sermon 2*

⁵⁶⁹ *Philokalia, Book 1*

⁵⁷⁰ *Commentary on John, Book 20:274*

His Creator; and His Mother since He watches over him, educates and feeds him, nurses and teaches him.

We have another father and mother...at the time when we had no faith, Satan was our father (Jn 8:44). We also had another mother- Babylon. However, we become acquainted with a Father who is God...and a Mother who is the heavenly Jerusalem- the Holy Church which has a part of it that is still estranged on earth...

By staying away from the father and mother- that is away from Satan and Babylon- we are received by God to be His children. He comforts us with things that do not transpire, and blesses us with eternal gifts...

The Lord Jesus Christ is our Head, and He is in Heaven. We have not yet risen above the reach of the hands of our enemies; and they are still able to roar wildly and attack us. However, our Head is indeed in heaven, and He tells us "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me" (Acts 9:4). He has also a home within us who live below (on earth). Yet we are with Him above at the same time for "He lifts up My head above my enemies"[6:10.

St. Augustine

"Which of you convicts Me of sin?

And if I tell the truth,

Why do you not believe Me?" [46]

Due to their resistance against the truth, the Jewish leaders examined each word of the Lord Jesus Christ. They did so in order to find fault with Him and not with the desire to get to know Him. He therefore asked them: **"Which of you convicts Me of sin?"**

In this situation, the Lord confronts sin with the Truth; and it is as though truth and righteousness are one and the same; just as sin and lies are one and the same. Truth bears fruit and one of its fruits is righteousness: in the same manner; lies are exposed by their fruit- that is by sin.

The word **'convicts'** in Greek is a legal term that implies 'setting up evidence against the accused.' No one can ever face and oppose the Lord Jesus Christ or witness against Him; whereas the Holy Spirit "convicts the world of sin" (Jn 16:8). He is the One who presents the true evidence of the world's sins, its judgment, and condemnation.

Our Lord is the only One who has no sin (1 Peter 2:22). He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet He was without sin (Heb.4:15). Therefore He could address these words to all who knew Him. In that light, you can understand that these words are directed to all mankind, and not only to those who heard them on that day:

"Which of you convicts Me of sin?" These words need to be interpreted as meaning: 'Who, out of all mankind?' Or 'What kind of person can accuse Me of sin?'

Surely, no one can do that⁵⁷¹.

❖ All things considered, the Lord Jesus Christ can say these words to all mankind as well as to Satan and all the armies subject to him. However, they cannot utter any accusation that He has sinned. This statement is in harmony with the Lord's words: "...the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me" (refer to Jn 14:30)⁵⁷².

❖ We too would be able to regain our confidence, after a while and great struggling, and be able to say the same words as the Lord's. Even as we depart of this world, we would be able to face Satan and his fallen angels who seek the chance to attack us and say: **"Which of you convicts Me of sin?"**⁵⁷³

Origin the Scholar

⁵⁷¹ Commentary on John, Book 20:277-278

⁵⁷² Commentary on John, Book 20: 281

⁵⁷³ Commentary on John, Book 20: 282

**“He who is of God hears God’s words;
therefore you do not hear,
because you are not of God” [47]**

Here the Lord brings another accusation against them: they are not of God for they do not hear Him. Samuel heard the word of God whereas Eli could not hear His voice. The Jewish leaders had become like Eli and could not hear God’s voice. Neither were they able to respond to Him for they were not of God.

❖ Paul, by natural lineage, was a child of wrath (Eph.2:3) before accepting the power to change and become God’s child (Jn 1:12). Who is better than him who underwent such a change? If the only way to become a child of God who is in heaven is to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt 5:44-45), then evidently no one listens to God’s words just because he has been naturally created by Him. Indeed, a person listens to God because he accepts to become God’s child. Moreover, he accepts that power and uses it adequately to love his enemies and pray for his persecutors. In this manner, he testifies to being a child of the heavenly Father: proceeding from Him, listening and understanding His words as well as digesting the knowledge they convey. Such features belong to God’s children who, on the one hand, have renounced their birth of (Satan) and are no longer slaves (Rom 8:15); and on the other hand have accepted their birth from God through the Spirit of adoption (Rom 15:8).

❖ Often, when we do not hear the words of God- that is when we do not understand them, we need to realize that this is a way that God uses to reprimand us for not being His children: When a person does not hear God’s words it signifies that person’s decision not to be God’s child and therefore not proceeding from Him. This may happen even though that a person might have accepted the power to become God’s child; yet has not changed (Jn 1:12). Such a person can be become the child of the heavenly Father only by loving his enemies and praying for his persecutors (Matt 5:44-45; Lk 6:28)⁵⁷⁴.

Origen

❖ Here too, the Jewish leaders reveal that they are not God’s children by the way they think. This is due to their being corrupt and not due to their nature as human beings. In a sense they are of God yet at the same time they are not. They are of God according to nature; yet they are not of God due to their corruption⁵⁷⁵.

❖ In the same manner, they are Abraham’s children, yet they are not ...they are his children based on their physical origin. However, they are not his children due to the sins of their parents who came after him and were persuaded by Satan. The same analogy can be applied to our Lord and God: they came from God but were not from Him. How did they come from God? Because God created man from whom they came...He is the great Engineer of nature. He is the Creator of the body as well as the spirit. How can they not be of Him? Because they have followed Satan’s ways and chosen to be corrupt themselves. Therefore they have become Satan’s children and no longer come of God⁵⁷⁶.

St. Augustine

6- The Lord is Accused of Blasphemy

⁵⁷⁴ *Commentary on John, Book 20: 291-293*

⁵⁷⁵ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:15*

⁵⁷⁶ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:15*

**‘ Then the Jews answered and said to Him,
“Do we not say rightly
that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”’[48]**

When the Lord revealed their wickedness and refuted their claim to being Abraham’s children, they attacked Him. They accused Him of blasphemy against God as well as against the nation. They accused Him of being a Samaritan- that is of being an enemy of the Jews, and of being an enemy of God since he had a demon.

No title other than ‘Samaritan’ could convey the enmity between a person and the Jewish nation. They had previously called the Lord a ‘Galilean’ to convey that He was a mean person. Calling Him a Samaritan, however, conveyed that he deserved to be brought to justice as an enemy of the Jewish nation. They considered the Lord to be a traitor to the country and to the nation. This is the same accusation the Samaritans charged against the Jews for they said that the Jews were not descendants of Abraham and they sought to damage their image and destroy their claim to being ‘God’s people.’ For many long centuries the Jews had called Christians ‘Samaritans’ to convey their hostility towards them. The second accusation: **“You have a demon...”** reflects their belief that there existed an alliance between the Lord and Satan based on two factors: His teachings marked Him as a ‘Samaritan who had broken away from their ranks- an inventor and a rebel opposing their laws. Besides, His miracles made them accuse Him of having a demon.

In amazing insistence, they affirmed that they were people of learning and knowledge. They claimed that they were convinced, based on their knowledge, that he had a demon. How? God had spoken to Abraham and the prophets; and these had listened to His words and interacted with Him. They walked His walk and yet they had died. Therefore could the words of Lord Jesus Christ be greater than God’s words? That was their logic and that was the fruit of their knowledge.

On this occasion the Jews revealed their ignorance. They could not distinguish between the Lord’s words “see death” and “taste death.” The Lord Jesus Christ tasted death, through the grace of God, for everyone (Heb. 2:9). The words ‘see death’ convey constant failure and subjugation under the power of death while fearing it. A person would be seized with trembling just thinking of death.

❖ It seems that there were some people who secretly commented among themselves about the Savior. They called Him a ‘Samaritan’ to indicate that He was like the Samaritans who interpreted incorrectly the Jewish tradition. The Jews did not deal with the Samaritans (Jn.4:9) as they disagreed with them concerning many teachings⁵⁷⁷.

❖ It is relevant to wonder how they could dare call the Savior a ‘Samaritan’ while He taught many things concerning the resurrection and judgment. Indeed, this is so different from the beliefs of the Samaritans who denied the concept of life after death and rejected the permanence or immortality of the spirit. They could have intended to insult Him by describing Him as a Samaritan because He was preaching the same teachings as the Samaritans... or because He seemed to comment upon the resurrection and eternal life just because He wanted to win the approval of the Jews and so preached what is generally accepted by them⁵⁷⁸.

❖ They said that the Lord was possessed by a demon due to His teachings that

⁵⁷⁷ *Commentary on John, Book 20:310*

⁵⁷⁸ *Commentary on John, Book 20:311-312*

transcended the limits of man's comprehension. For example, He claimed that God was His Father (Jn 5:18); that He descended from heaven (Jn 6:32-35); and other numerous matters that are reported throughout the other gospels.

❖ They might have said that He 'has a demon' because some of them believed that He was Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons, and therefore could cast out demons (Lk 11:15)⁵⁷⁹.

Origen

**'Jesus answered,
"I do not have a demon;
but I honor My Father,
and you dishonor Me [49]**

Origen comments that the Lord Jesus Christ did not respond to the accusation that He was a Samaritan. However, He answered the accusation that He had a demon. Origen explains that the reason for this is that the Lord Himself had given the example of the good Samaritan (Lk10:30-34) which revealed the tenderness the Samaritan demonstrated toward the wounded one who had fallen by the roadside.

If Paul could 'become all things to all men so that (he) might by all means save some' (1Cor 9:22); then our Lord would do much more. He is the One who seeks to save all mankind. It did not embarrass Him to be a Samaritan to save Samaritans. Note that the meaning of 'Samaritan' is 'guardian'; and the Lord is the Guardian of all souls⁵⁸⁰! Truly, He is the guardian of those who have recognized that 'Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain' (Ps 127 :1). [The following verses describe the Lord as the guardian of all human souls: 'He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep' (Ps 121:4); and the Lord is the keeper of the young and the poor (Ps113:7)⁵⁸¹]. Origen adds: [At any rate, the Hebrews used to call the guards by the word 'Somer.' Their traditions also report that the Samaritans first received that name when the Assyrian king sent them to be guards in the land of Israel after the exile⁵⁸²].

❖ The Lord rejected one accusation, and disregarded the other. He answered: "I do not have a demon..."; but He did not say "I am not a Samaritan." Moreover, He did return the curse by a similar one, or the blasphemy by another one. It was appropriate for Him to renounce one accusation and leave the other, and He did so with a certain goal in mind, my friends: because a 'Samaritan' indicated 'a guard' or 'keeper' and He knew He is a guard Himself: 'He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep'; and 'Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain' (Ps127 :1). Therefore the Lord is our keeper and He is the One who has created us ...that is why He answered that He has no demon, and yet did not say that He was not a Samaritan⁵⁸³.

St. Augustine

❖ Listen to the Lord's response after He was insulted: **"I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father...."** The Lord did not wish to say 'I am not a Samaritan' but rather said **"I do not have a demon."** He was faced by two accusations: He renounced one and appeared to accept the other by being silent. If He had denied being a Samaritan, He would have denied, at the same time, His being a guardian. He kept silent regarding a matter He knew to be true; but He rejected patiently what they

⁵⁷⁹ *Commentary on John, Book 20:313-314*

⁵⁸⁰ *Commentary on John, Book 20:316*

⁵⁸¹ *Commentary on John, Book 20:320*

⁵⁸² *Commentary on John, Book 20:321*

⁵⁸³ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:2*

unjustly said about Him. Notice how the Lord did not get angry when He was insulted. Besides, His response did not carry wicked words. If His accusers did not have demons themselves, they would not have been able to say such shameful things against God⁵⁸⁴.

Pope Gregory the Great

St. Augustine reveals to us the role of Satan in people's lives. He says the following:

❖ A prevalent concept in the Bible is that sinners act unreasonably in so many ways only because they have accepted the influence of a bad spirit or the unclean will of a devil.

❖ Moreover, '...there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin' (Eccles 7:20). Therefore there is no one who is constantly free of devils and who never falls as a prey to their influence⁵⁸⁵.

❖ Is that not a proof that we are subject to Satan: when we shout out, driven by anger and displeasure, or in a state of frenzy, or act like a neighing animal gone wild? As a result of that, we even abuse our wives and treat them lustfully as untamed horses (Jer 5:8). Moreover, do we not disregard the Lord's words urging us to get liberated from lust?

Consider how we become miserable, depressed, and frustrated due to anger and absence of the sublimity worthy of reasonable beings. We forget that not a single sparrow falls into a trap without the permission of God. He rules over all the concerns of mankind and His rulings are just. Is there any explanation for our sufferings other than that Satan has overpowered and corrupted the controlling element within us? Besides, how do you explain our fear of things that are not fearful? What about our exaggerated expressions of joy over unworthy things? All these can be explained only as being devilish responses that fill a person who has been unable to say truthfully: "**I do not have a demon...**"⁵⁸⁶.

❖ The holy books of the Bible reveal that even those who have been transformed into better beings were unable to say constantly and from the beginning that they '**do not have a demon.**' Such a statement is true of the Lord Jesus Christ alone and it applies to Him from the very beginning. That is why He alone has honored the Father in a worthy and correct manner⁵⁸⁷.

Origen

❖ "**...But I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me...**" [49]. These words are intended to convey the following: 'I do not honor Myself so that you do not think that I am arrogant. I honor the only One; and if you knew Me you would have honored Me just as I honor the Father. I act worthily, while you do not'⁵⁸⁸.

St. Augustine

❖ A perfect Father conceived a perfect Son; and delivered all things into His hands. Therefore the Son declares: "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father...." (Matt 11:27). The Father is glorified through the Son who states: "...I honor My Father"; and also "...Just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love..." (Jn15:10)⁵⁸⁹.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

⁵⁸⁴ Hom. 16, Forty Gospel Homilies, 114-115 Pl16:1150

⁵⁸⁵ Commentary on John, Book 20:326

⁵⁸⁶ Commentary on John, Book 20:332-334

⁵⁸⁷ Commentary on John, Book 20:334

⁵⁸⁸ St. Augustine, On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:3

⁵⁸⁹ Essay 7:5

❖ **“...I glorify My Father...”**: The Lord has no father other than God who is in heaven.⁵⁹⁰

❖ We too fulfill these words when we comprehend and accept the cleansing of the new birth (Titus 3:5). By being washed by the Holy Spirit, we become children of God; and so we do not call anyone on earth our ‘Father’ (Matt 23:9). Indeed, it is in this manner that we become the children of God who is in heaven; and brothers to the One who said: “...I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God...” (Jn 20:17).

When the Lord says accurately and with full legal correctness “...I do not have a demon...”, it becomes evident for all who follow His example that they become empowered and can do all things through Christ who grants strength (Phil 4:13). Each of His children can say as well: ‘I do not have a demon but I honor My Father.’ Nevertheless, who can say ‘I do not have a demon’ but still lives in the graves and among the dead?⁵⁹¹

Or who can say: **“I honor My Father...”** [49] and who considers himself a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ while he honors things other than God, His Word, and the commandments in His Word? How can a person make such a claim while he honors someone else instead of offering honor to Him who is worthy of honor? (Rom 13:17)⁵⁹².

The words **“...you dishonor Me...”** are relevant to all those who dishonor Him, and not only to those who heard Him on that day. They are relevant throughout all time as they indicate those who dishonor Him by behaving in contradiction to the upright Word of God. These dishonor the Lord, who is Justice, through their unjust deeds. They dishonor the power of God, who is the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior (1Cor 1:24)...by their weak and hideous deeds⁵⁹³.

❖ The words **“...you dishonor Me...”** point relevantly to anyone who despises wisdom; for Christ is Wisdom as well (1Cor 1:24)⁵⁹⁴.

❖ Anyone who does wicked deeds dishonors the Lord Jesus Christ, for by his deeds that person dishonors the Light⁵⁹⁵.

❖ God, who gave us His Son, seeks the glory of the Lord in all those who receive Him. He finds glory and honor in all those who guard themselves and seize the opportunity to practice the virtue that is sowed in them. However, God does not find glory in those who behave without virtue. Indeed, honor cannot be found in persons who have two masters and who not honor the Son. He says to these: “Because of you, My Name is constantly dishonored among nations”⁵⁹⁶.

Origen

**“...And I do not seek My own glory;
there is One who seeks and judges...”(50)**

“...I do not seek My own glory...”, therefore I turn away from judging you.

However, I take it upon Myself to urge you to persevere and advise you to honor God. In this manner you will not only avoid judgment but will earn eternal life as well⁵⁹⁷.

St. John Chrysostom

⁵⁹⁰ *Commentary on John, Book 20:339*

⁵⁹¹ *Commentary on John, Book 20:340-341*

⁵⁹² *Commentary on John, Book 20:342*

⁵⁹³ *Commentary on John, Book 20:344*

⁵⁹⁴ *Commentary on John, Book 20:345*

⁵⁹⁵ *Commentary on John, Book 20:348*

⁵⁹⁶ *Commentary on John, Book 20:350*

⁵⁹⁷ *Homilies on St. John: 55:1*

❖ The Lord says: “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son...” How does He say that, while in this verse He says: “...I do not seek My own glory, there is One who seeks and judges...”? The answer is found in the holy Word, for the Bible tells us that there is judgment and condemnation ‘...he who does not believe is condemned...’ (Jn 3:18); and “...for the hour is coming in which all those who are in the graves will hear His Voice and come forth...those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation...” (Jn 5:28-29). Therefore you know how He judges to condemn and to punish. If we always equate judgment with condemnation, then we will hear the words ‘Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause.’ In the first part, the Psalmist is aware of the painful judgment (‘Vindicate me, O God’); ...then he makes the distinction in the second part (‘and plead my cause against an ungodly nation’) (Ps 43:1). In the same manner, the Lord says: “I do not seek My own glory, there is One who seeks and judges.” How is there ‘One who seeks and judges’? There is the Father who distinguishes between My glory and your glory. You are glorified in the spirit of this world; whereas I am glorified in a different manner...What distinction does the Lord make here? The glory of the Father’s Son lies in the glory of devoted men. This is clear in the following words: ‘...Your God has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions...,’ (Ps 45:7). This means that though the Lord became incarnate yet He cannot be compared with us. We, as human beings, are sinners; whereas He is without sin. We, as human beings, have inherited sin and death from Adam; whereas He received a body that was dead from the holy Virgin Mary but He had no sin⁵⁹⁸.

St. Augustine

Some may wonder again: How does the Lord say: “there is One who seeks and judges...”, but then states: “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son...” (Jn 5:22)? Origen explains this as follows: [‘Meditate on these words as an answer to such objections: “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me...”’ (Jn5:30). Now, since our Savior judges according to what He hears from the Father; and does not seek His own will, but rather seeks to do the will of the Father who sent Him...then judgment proceeds from the Speaker (the Father) to the Listener (the Son) and not vice versa⁵⁹⁹].

7- The Messiah, the Giver of Life

**“Most assuredly, I say to you,
if anyone keeps My word,
he shall never see death” [51].**

Moses received the promise of long life and prosperity for himself as well as for all those who keep the divine commandments. Here the Lord Jesus Christ offers eternal life and victory over death to those who keep His word: death cannot dominate the soul of a true believer.

In order to enjoy eternal glory, it is worthwhile for us to accept the divine Word, and apply and abide/ be steadfast in it. That is the meaning of ‘keeping the Word.’ He who lives according to the Word enjoys a new understanding of death. He/she realizes that it is a passing over into another life. Therefore true death has a new significance as it indicates the soul’s deprivation of God’s presence- while God is the source of the

⁵⁹⁸ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:4,9*

⁵⁹⁹ *Commentary on John, Book 20:352-353*

soul's existence and life. This kind of death has no power over a believer.

❖ The Lord speaks, in this passage, not only about faith but also about sanctified living. Earlier in His teachings, the Lord said "...may have everlasting life" (Jn 6:40). Here He says: "shall never see death..." [51]. At the same time, the Lord is giving the Jews a hint that they would not be able to take any action against Him: If all those who keep His word will not die, then how much more truly does this apply to the Lord Himself⁶⁰⁰.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ In the same manner that there are different kinds of life, so there are different kinds of death. There is a wicked and violent death which is antagonistic to the One who says: "I am the life ..." (Jn 11:25). This kind of death is described in 1 Cor 15:26 which says that: "...the last enemy which is destroyed is death."

We need to think of this death in the light of St. Paul's words: "...just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned- ('For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigns from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam'": Rom. 5:12-14). A few lines farther on, St. Paul adds: "for if by one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of One Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many..." (Rom 5:17)...and therefore he who keeps the words of the only Son, the firstborn over all creation (Col 1:15), will not see death; for it is the nature of the Word to destroy the power of death⁶⁰¹.

❖ At the same time, everyone should protect his inner life that is inseparable from him. This life is the very same light that shines upon those who live in darkness. In this manner the darkness will never defeat them (1 Jn 1:4-5)⁶⁰².

❖ Truly, no one will see death as long as he keeps the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, we will see death as soon as we stop observing them⁶⁰³.

❖ You say "**I have a demon...**"[48]; whereas I invite you to life. Keep My words so that you do not die. They had heard Him say: "...**if anyone keeps My word, he shall never see death**" [51]. Indeed, the Lord knew of another death and He had come to save us all from it- the second death, the eternal hellish death, the death of condemnation with Satan and his angels. This is the real death, whereas the other death is merely a transition. What is the other death? It consists of abandoning the body, dismantling its heavy burden and putting it away so that it no longer drags a person downwards into hell. The Lord speaks about real death in these words: "**If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death**"⁶⁰⁴.

St. Augustine

'Then the Jews said to Him:

"Now we know that You have a demon!

Abraham is dead and the prophets; and You say 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death'?"[52].

❖ Those present and heard the Lord's words '**If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death**' thought that He was speaking about physical death; for Abraham and the prophets had died⁶⁰⁵.

⁶⁰⁰ Homily 55. PG 59:322

⁶⁰¹ Commentary on John, Book 20: 363-367

⁶⁰² Commentary on John, Book 20: 370

⁶⁰³ Commentary on John, Book 20:373

⁶⁰⁴ St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:10-11

⁶⁰⁵ Commentary on John, Book 20:380

Origen

❖ Abraham and the prophets had died. However, their death was not the kind of death that the Lord wished them to understand. These had died, and yet were alive. Whereas those seeking to kill Him were dead; even though they believed they were alive. On another occasion, the Sadducees had questioned the Lord about the resurrection, and He answered: “But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham; the God of Isaac; and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt 23:31,32; Lk12:4-5). Therefore if these godly men are alive, then let us struggle to live, so that we might live with them after death⁶⁰⁶.

St. Augustine

“Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead?

And the prophets are dead. Who do you make Yourself out to be?”[53]

❖ When the resistance of the wicked increases, we should not cease from witnessing. Indeed, we should double our efforts to spread the Word. This is the example that the Lord sets before us on this occasion ...just as resistance could change a good person into a better one, so do the trespassers get worse when they are gently treated. After the Jewish leaders had heard the Lord’s teachings, they repeated their words “...you have a demon...” [52]. They adhered to eternal death without questioning if what they upheld was death itself. They were preoccupied with physical death; and they were blinded to the implications of the true Word. Besides, in order to honor Abraham and the prophets, they had placed them above the Truth Himself. It becomes evident to us that those who do not know God will honor His servants in an incorrect manner⁶⁰⁷.

Pope Gregory the Great

❖ It would have been adequate if they had said ‘Maybe you are greater than God?’ or ‘Maybe those who are listening to You are greater than Abraham?’ However, they did not say so for they believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was of a lower rank than Abraham. Earlier on they had told the Lord “You have a demon” [52]. In contrast, the Samaritan woman did not use that language, and her words were: “Are You greater than our father Jacob?” (Jn 4:12). These Jews were insulting, whereas the Samaritan woman was curious and wanted to learn who He was. When she felt confused, she was on her guard as she said: “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet” (Jn 4:19).

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Abraham had died, yet he was alive (Matt 22:23): he did not see death, for he saw the Lord Jesus Christ and was glad and rejoiced [56]. We believe that this is the reason why our Savior responded to their words that ‘Abraham is dead’ by saying: “Your father rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” [56]. He said this to teach them that Abraham is alive⁶⁰⁸!

❖ He is the God of the Living and not of the dead (Matt 22:23), the God of Isaac and Jacob, besides the God of all the other prophets- for they all kept the word of the Son of God which came to Hosea, Jeremiah, and Isaiah. The Word of God that came to

⁶⁰⁶ St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:13*

⁶⁰⁷ *Hom. 16. Forty Gospel Homilies, 116-P176:1150*

⁶⁰⁸ *Commentary on John, Book 20:394-395*

each one of these is the same One who was with God from the beginning: His Son, God the Word⁶⁰⁹.

Origen

**‘Jesus answered: “If I honor Myself,
My honor is nothing.
It is My Father who honors Me,
of whom you say that He is your God” [54]**

Through the oneness of the Essence, each Entity/Being honors the two others. That is why we read that God is honored by the Son, while God honors the Son at the same time (Jn 7:33).

“...of whom you say that He is your God” [54]: while they claim that God is their Father, here they appear as His enemies in their spirits and deeds.

Is His honor of no importance? It does not appear important to them. The Lord echoes their response when He says: “...My witness is not true...” (Matt 31:5); for He knew that this was their opinion. However, He adds: **“...It is My Father who honors Me...”[54]⁶¹⁰**.

St. John Chrysostom

Is there any doubt here that the Son is honored by the Father, and that the Father is honored by the Son? To underline this oneness, the union of the Trinity, the Lord also says in the following verses that He is honored by the Holy Spirit: “He (the Holy Spirit) will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine...” (Jn 16:14). Therefore the Holy Spirit also glorifies the Son of God. Then why does the Lord say: **“If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing” [54]**? Is the honor of the Son of no importance? If we said so, we would be blaspheming, unless we are referring to His body only. The Son here had the body of a human being; and if the honor of the body is compared to the honor of the divine One, then it is without honor⁶¹¹.

St. Ambrose

❖ The Lord Jesus Christ was telling the Jews that He is honored by the Father whom they called God- since He honors the Son and the Son honors Him, then may the obstinacy (of Arius and other heretics) be renounced and may they acknowledge this unity and correct their delinquency⁶¹².

St. Augustine

**“Yet you have not known Him,
but I know Him.
And if I say: ‘I do not know Him’,
I shall be a liar like you,
but I do know Him and keep His word. [55]
“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day,
and he saw it and was glad” [56]**

Because the Jews boasted that they were Abraham’s descendents, the Lord underlined that Abraham, their father, yearned to see and honor Him. Besides, Abraham foresaw His coming. Since the Lord was before Abraham was, then His teachings were not

⁶⁰⁹ *Commentary on John, Book 20:398*

⁶¹⁰ *Homilies on St. John 55:2*

⁶¹¹ *On the Holy Spirit, Book 5:8:113*

⁶¹² *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:4*

new: He was there before Moses who is the recipient of the law.

When did Abraham see the Lord's day and so rejoiced?

- A- St. Paul says that Abraham saw the day of the Lord when he received the promise that the Lord would be his descendant (Gal 3:16). The promise was that the Lord will come to bless all the tribes of the earth (Acts 3:25-26).
 - B- Origen states that Abraham saw the day of the Lord after he had walked for three days. Then he lifted his eyes and saw the place for the burnt offering at a distance (Gen 22:4). He experienced the path of the resurrection on the third day and after a three day walk. Consequently, he enjoyed a new meaning for the offering: the offering of the only begotten Son.
 - C- St. Ambrose believes that Abraham saw the day of the Lord when God swore to bless him and multiply his descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand on the seashore (Gen 22:16).
- ❖ The One who swore by Himself is the very same One whom Abraham saw⁶¹³.

St. Ambrose

❖ We believe that Pelagius missed the fact that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was not obscured in the days of our fathers, even though it was declared much later on. In fact, our fathers were saved through the grace of God. In the same manner, all members of the human race can be saved through God's incomprehensible and mysterious decision. That is the reason why the apostle says: "They had the same spirit of faith...." Consequently, there can be no doubt He is the same One that our fathers believed in- it is written: 'I believed and therefore I spoke. We also believe and therefore speak...' (refer to 2 Cor 4:13;Ps 115:10). That is why the Intercessor Himself said: "Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (Jn 8:56). Similarly, Melchizedek, when he offered the mystery of the Lord's table, he knew that that this was a forerunner and a symbol of the eternal priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ (Gen 14:18)⁶¹⁴.

❖ Abraham was not frightened, but was glad to see the day of the Lord This was because he had the love that casts out all fear (1Jn 4:18). The Lord did not say 'he rejoiced because he saw'; but said "he rejoiced to see." This indicates that Abraham believed under all circumstances. He rejoiced because he hoped to see and comprehend: therefore "he saw it and was glad"...if those whose physical eyes were opened rejoiced, how much more is the joy of the person who gains inner sight and sees this indescribable light? How much is the joy of those who perceive the Light of the Word abiding in the Father; the brilliance that dazzles the minds of the pious and which proceeds from the Wisdom that never fails; and God abiding in the Son? At the same time, they see Him coming in the flesh without ever abandoning the Father's embrace. Abraham saw all that⁶¹⁵.

St. Augustine

❖ "My day" refers to the day of the Crucifixion which Abraham saw in the symbol and offering of the lamb and Isaac⁶¹⁶.

St. John Chrysostom

⁶¹³ *Of the Christian Faith*, 2:8:72

⁶¹⁴ *Letters*,177

⁶¹⁵ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:16*

⁶¹⁶ *Hom55.PG 59:323*

❖ It is enough for you to know rightly- as we have said earlier- that God has one only Son who came through a natural birth. Yet the day of His birth did not mark His beginning for He existed before time ever began. Listen to the words of Micah the prophet: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrath, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be the ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

Therefore do not think of the One who has just come out of Bethlehem (and do not consider Him to be new); but worship Him as He is the One born of the Father before all time...

Do you wish to know that the Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal King? Listen to His words: “**Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad**” (Jn 8:56). The Jews found this hard to accept, but the Lord explained that it was not hard as “...**before Abraham was, I AM**” (Jn 8: 58).

He also says: “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was”; and He also said: “...for You have loved Me before the foundation of the world” (Jn 17:24). With these words the Lord Jesus Christ revealed that He is eternal⁶¹⁷.

St. Cyril the Great

The prophets were called ‘seers’ (1 Sam 9:9) as they saw what others could not.

Abraham saw the day of the Lord and rejoiced (Jn 8: 56).

The law is spiritual (Rom 7:14), yet there is a need for a proclamation to help us understand it. This comes when God reveals His face so that we might see Him and His glory...

The heavens which were sealed to the rebellious nation were opened to Ezekial⁶¹⁸.

St. Jerome

**‘Then the Jews said to Him,
“You are not yet fifty years old,
and have You seen Abraham?” [57]
Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you,
before Abraham was, I AM” [58]**

❖ Why did the Lord not say: ‘Before Abraham was, I was’; but rather said: “I AM”? The Lord used these words to indicate the continuity of His Being before and above all time. That is why these words were considered to be blasphemous⁶¹⁹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Evaluate the words and comprehend the mystery: “...**before he was (created, was made) I AM.**” Note that ‘created’ (was made) refers to the creation of mankind; while ‘I AM’ refers to the Divine Essence. The Lord did not say ‘Before he was, I was’ for He is the One created by no one other than ME who is from the beginning. The Lord did not say ‘Before Abraham was created, I was created’ in order to allow us to distinguish between the Creator and the created⁶²⁰.

St. Augustine

⁶¹⁷ *Essay 11:20*

⁶¹⁸ *Letter 53:4*

⁶¹⁹ *Hom 55:PG59:324*

⁶²⁰ *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:17*

❖ “I AM” is expressed in the present tense for the Divine has no past or future. He is continuously ‘being.’ Therefore the Lord does not say: ‘I was before Abraham’⁶²¹.

Pope Gregory the Great

**‘Then they took up stones to throw at Him;
but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple,
going through the midst of them, and so passed by.’[59]**

The Lord was accused of blasphemy; therefore they considered, according to the law, that He deserved to be stoned (Lev 24:16). It was necessary to take Him outside the temple in order to do so; but He passed through them and they were unable to see Him. The Lord departed silently. In the same manner, the Lord enters the heart silently; or departs silently from those who reject His kingdom. The Lord departed from Samson silently while he was not aware (Judges 16:20).

❖ The Lord appeared to accept stoning; but woe to them whom the Lord has forsaken and escaped from their stony hearts⁶²².

St. Augustine

❖ Why did God hide Himself? Our Savior became incarnate and lived among men to teach us through His words and His example. What does He convey through this example other than that we should humbly avoid the anger of the proud. We need to do the same whenever we have to resist opposition. In this context St. Paul tells us: “...do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath...” (Rom 12:19). No one should be angered due to resistance directed against him. Harm should not be the response to harm. It is more honorable to imitate the Lord and escape silently from humiliation, rather than get engaged in responding to it. Haughty persons resent such passive behavior as they believe in their hearts that it is shameful to be silent. They do not understand that you are demonstrating patience; and imagine that by being silent you admit the accusation brought against you. However, this manner of thinking results from our thoughts that are geared to earthly matters. When we seek honor on earth, we are not concerned with pleasing God who sees us from heaven⁶²³.

Pope Gregory the Great



⁶²¹ Hom 16, Forty Gospel Homilies, 116-117

⁶²² St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:18

⁶²³ Hom 16, Forty Gospel Homilies

Chapter 8 Commentary On the Story of the Adulterous Woman

Some scholars consider that the story of the adulterous woman has no place in the Gospel of St. John. In spite of the wonderful spiritual meaning that the story conveys; and its harmony with the thoughts and deeds of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the other holy gospels; they have the following reservations:

First: Some of the early fathers did not include the story in their interpretation of the Gospel of St. John; although they referred to it in their other writings. Among those who did not mention it are Origen, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Cyprian.

Second; The story that is told in the Greek language contains some words that do not occur in the rest of this gospel, or occur very rarely.

Third: The 'scribes' were mentioned as well as the Pharisees. However, St. John does not do so in the rest of his gospel. Moreover, he mentions Mount Olives and that the Lord taught while He was sitting, etc....

However, other scholars find that the story is authentic as an event as well as in its place in the gospel. They base their opinion on the following:

First: The story has been included in many of the interpretations by fathers of the Western churches such as St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and St. Ambrose. They included it because the Latin version of the Vulgate mentions that the story is told in many of the Greek manuscripts.

Second: The story occurs in more than one manuscript, especially in Latin ones. Besides it occurs in the Memphetic, Ethiopian, and Armenian versions.

Third: The reservations of some Eastern fathers could be explained as a concern towards those who had been converted. They avoided the subject of the adulterous woman, and they did not interpret it while they worked on the rest of St. John's Gospel. They feared that the converts would find in her story an unwarranted flexibility toward the sin of adultery.

Fourth: The story with all its details occurs in the book 'Apostolic Constitutions'⁶²⁴. It occurs in the section dealing with the acceptance of penitents into the church; as well as with the response to those who respect the repentance of sinners.

Fifth: However, from a theological and spiritual aspect, the story occupies a most meaningful place in the St. John's Gospel. It comes right after the Lord's teachings on the last day of the feast. He had invited the thirsty to come and drink of the living water so that rivers of living water would flow out of their hearts (Jn 7: 37 etc...). It also comes just before His teachings about Himself as the Light of the world. In this story, the Lord Jesus Christ exposes the souls of those who have filled themselves with the water of pleasures in this world. These therefore deserve to be stoned. They have become subject to condemnation even by mankind. However, the Lord waters souls with His divine love and transforms them into His brides, making them worthy of fellowship with Him. At the same time, these souls preach repentance and are witnesses for the amazing power of the Mediator! The adulterous woman had spent her life in darkness. She wished to die and be burned rather than be stoned. Yet the divine Light shone upon her and she found the Father's embrace waiting to receive her!

⁶²⁴ *Apostolic Constitutions: 2:24*

Truly, this woman has become a symbol for all miserable mankind: she became the happiest being in the world when she had met with the Savior of mankind!



Inspiration Drawn from Chapter Eight

May Your Light Shine Upon Me

And

May My Judgment be Transformed into an Eternal Wedding!

❖ May You shine upon my heart with the light of Your love
And may You enter with me into the violent judgment court of the Pharisees
Instead of bringing me to judgment, prepare me for the eternal wedding!
I no longer fear their stony hearts that throw stones at me
For You pour Your sublime love into my depths.
There is no lawyer to defend me:
You are my Mediator, Savior, and the Liberator of my soul!
You hold my hand and bring me into Your Kingdom, O holy One!

❖ The world sought to condemn me, but has condemned itself
Grant me the will not to condemn anyone, lest I fail and be condemned by You
May I condemn myself, then you will save me by Your Blood, O Savior of the world!
You alone can renew my life with Your Holy Spirit
You transform adulterers into saints
O holy One who has changed the nature of the furnace into coolness for the three
youths
And the nature of the hungry lions into friends of Daniel the prophet!

❖ You have commanded me not to go back and sin
Who can fulfill that without Your grace?
It is a divine commandment, indeed, it is a divine promise fulfilled in Me
You are the Light of the world: You are My light
As I walk in Your light, the darkness of sin cannot creep into my being.

❖ You are the Source of living water that overflows within me
You are the Light of the world, changing my inner depths into a shining lamp!
You are the Son of God, granting me the spirit of adoption through Your Holy Spirit
You carry me from slavery to the glorious freedom enjoyed by God's children!

❖ I boasted of my lineage to Abraham, the father of the fathers
But I willfully did not follow his example
I became a slave to sin, and a child of Satan the deceiver.
I became a stone with no spiritual feelings.
Now, You have transformed me into a child of Abraham
You tear away my slavery to sin and make me a servant to Righteousness
You carry me into the fold of the adopted children of God Your Father!

Now I truly rejoice at the Lord's Day with my father Abraham!
Glory be to You, O Giver of liberty to all mankind
O Source of true joy!
When will I see You face to face, and so join all my fathers and become as a bride
sanctified to You!

Amen



END OF PART ONE
Of
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST JOHN