

1 Corinthians 11:17

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the importance of unity and humility in the practice of communal meals, particularly the Lord's Supper, while addressing the divisions among the Corinthians.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:19

Topics: "Lord's Supper", "Church Unity"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of partaking in the Lord's Supper with reverence and love, highlighting the significance of unity, humility, and compassion among believers. He addresses the Corinthians' misconduct during communal meals, emphasizing the need to care for the poor and not bring shame to the Church through divisions and neglect. Chrysostom connects the present actions of the congregation to the Last Supper, urging them to remember Christ's sacrifice and to approach the Eucharist with a pure heart and mindful of their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Transcript

But in giving you this charge, I praise you not, that you come together not for the better, but for the worse.

It is necessary in considering the present charge to state also first the occasion of it. For thus again will our discourse be more intelligible. What then is this occasion?

As in the case of the three thousand who believed in the beginning, all had eaten their meals in common and had all things common; such also was the practice at the time when the Apostle wrote this: not such indeed exactly; but as it were a certain outflowing of that communion which abode among them descended also to them that came after. And because of course some were poor, but others rich, they laid not down all their goods in the midst, but made the tables open on stated days, as it should seem; and when the solemn service was completed, after the communion of the Mysteries, they all went to a common entertainment, the rich bringing their provisions with them, and the poor and destitute being invited by them, and all feasting in common. But afterward this custom also became corrupt. And the reason was, their being divided and addicting themselves, some to this party, and others to that, and saying, I am of such a one, and I of such a one; which thing also to correct he said in the beginning of the Epistle, For it has been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them which are of the household of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I mean, that each one of you says, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas. Not that Paul was the person to whom they were attaching themselves; for he would not have borne it: but wishing by concession to tear up this custom from the root,

he introduced himself, indicating that if any one had inscribed upon himself even his name when breaking off from the common body, even so the thing done was profane and extreme wickedness. And if in his case it were wickedness, much more in the case of those who were inferior to him.

2. Since therefore this custom was broken through, a custom most excellent and most useful; (for it was a foundation of love, and a comfort to poverty, and a corrective of riches, and an occasion of the highest philosophy, and an instruction of humility) since however he saw so great advantages in a way to be destroyed, he naturally addresses them with severity, thus saying: But in giving you this charge, I praise you not. For in the former charge, as there were many who kept (the ordinances), he began otherwise, saying thus: Now I praise you that you remember me in all things: but here contrariwise, But in giving you this charge, I praise you not. And here is the reason why he placed it not after the rebuke of them that eat the idol-sacrifices. But because that was unusually harsh he interposes the discourse about wearing of long hair, that he might not have to pass from one set of vehement reproofs to others again of an invidious kind and so appear too harsh: and then he returns to the more vehement tone, and says, But in giving you this charge, I praise you not. What is this? That which I am about to tell you of. What is, giving you this charge, I praise you not? I do not approve you, says he, because you have reduced me to the necessity of giving advice: I do not praise you, because you have required instruction in regard to this, because you have need of an admonition from me. Do you perceive how from his beginning he signifies that what was done was very profane? For when he that errs ought not to require so much as a hint to prevent his erring, the error would seem to be unpardonable.

And why do you not praise? Because ye come together, says he, not for the better but for the worse; i.e., because ye do not go forward unto virtue. For it were meet that your liberality should increase and become manifold, but you have taken rather from the custom which already prevailed, and have so taken from it as even to need warning from me, in order that you may return to the former order.

Further, that he might not seem to say these things on account of the poor only, he does not at once strike in to the discourse concerning the tables, lest he render his rebuke such as they might easily come to think slightly of, but he searches for an expression most confounding and very fearful. For what says he?

1 Corinthians 11:18

For first of all, when you come together in the Church, I hear that divisions exist among you.

And he says not, For fear that you do not sup together in common; for I hear that you feast in private, and not with the poor: but what was most calculated thoroughly to shake their minds, that he set down, the name of division, which was the cause of this mischief also: and so he reminded them again of that which was said in the beginning of the Epistle, and was signified by them of the house of Chloe. 1 Corinthians 1:11 And I partly believe it.

Thus, lest they should say, But what if the accusers speak falsely? he neither says, I believe it, lest he should rather make them reckless; nor again, on the other hand, I disbelieve it, lest he should seem to reprove without cause, but, I partly believe it, says he, i.e., I believe it in a small part; making them anxious and inviting them to return to correction.

1 Corinthians 11:19

3. For there must be also factions among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

By factions, here he means those which concern not the doctrines, but these present divisions. But even if he had spoken of the doctrinal heresies, not even thus did he give them any handle. For Christ Himself said, it must needs be that occasions of stumbling come, Matthew 18:7 not destroying the liberty of the will nor appointing any necessity and compulsion over man's life, but foretelling what would certainly ensue from the evil mind of men; which would take place, not because of his prediction, but because the incurably disposed are so minded. For not because he foretold them did these things happen: but because they were certainly about to happen, therefore he foretold them. Since, if the occasions of stumbling were of necessity and not of the mind of them that bring them in, it was superfluous His saying, Woe to that man by whom the occasion comes. But these things we discussed more at length when we were upon the passage itself ; now we must proceed to what is before us.

Now that he said these things of these factions relating to the tables, and that contention and division, he made manifest also from what follows. For having said, I hear that there are divisions among you, he stopped not here, but signifying what divisions he means he goes on to say, each one takes before other his own supper; and again, What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the Church of God? However, that of these he was speaking is evident. And if he call them divisions, marvel not. For, as I said, he wishes to touch them by the expression: whereas had they been divisions of doctrine, he would not have discoursed with them thus mildly. Hear him, for instance, when he speaks of any such thing, how vehement he is both in assertion and in reproof: in assertion, as when he says, If even an angel preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed; Galatians 1:8 but in reproof, as when he says, Whosoever of you would be justified by the law, you are fallen away from grace. Galatians 5:4 And at one time he calls the corrupters dogs, saying, Beware of dogs: Philippians 3:2 at another, having their consciences seared with a hot iron. 1 Timothy 4:2 And again, angels of Satan: 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 but here he said no such thing, but spoke in a gentle and subdued tone.

But what is, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you? That they may shine the more. And what he intends to say is this, that those who are unchangeable and firm are so far from being at all injured hereby, but even shows them the more, and that it makes them more glorious. For the word, that , is not every where indicative of cause, but frequently also of the event of things. Thus Christ Himself uses it, when He says, For judgement I have come into this world; that they which see not may see, and that they which see may be made blind. John 9:39 So likewise Paul in another place, when discoursing of the law, he writes, And the Law came in beside, that the trespass might abound. Romans 5:20 But neither was the law given to this end that the trespasses of the Jews might be increased: (though this did ensue:) nor did Christ come for this end that they which see might be made blind, but for the contrary; but the result was such. Thus then also here must one understand the expression, that they which are approved may be made manifest. For not at all with this view came heresies into being, that they which are approved may be made manifest, but on these heresies taking place such was the result. Now these things he said to console the poor, those of them who nobly bore that sort of contempt. Wherefore he said not, that they may become approved, but, that they which are approved may be made manifest; showing that before this also they were such, but they were mixed up with the multitude, and while enjoying such relief as was afforded them by the rich, they were not very conspicuous: but now this strife and contentiousness made them manifest, even as the storm shows the pilot. And he said not, that you may appear approved, but, that they which are approved may be made manifest, those among you who are

such. For neither when he is accusing does he lay them open, that he may not render them more reckless; nor when praising, that he may not make them more boastful; but he leaves both this expression and that in suspense, allowing each man's own conscience to make the application of what he says.

Nor does he here seem to me to be comforting the poor only, but those also who were not violating the custom. For it was likely that there were among them also those that observed it.

And this is why he said, I partly believe it. Justly then does he call these approved, who not only with the rest observed the custom, but even without them kept this good law undisturbed. And he does this, studying by such praises to render both others and these persons themselves more forward.

4. Then at last he adds the very form of offense. And what is it?

1 Corinthians 11:20

When ye assemble yourselves together, says he, it is not possible to eat the Lord's Supper.

Do you see how effectually appealing to their shame, even already by way of narrative he contrives to give them his counsel? For the appearance of your assembly, says he, is different. It is one of love and brotherly affection. At least one place receives you all, and you are together in one flock. But the Banquet, when you come to that, bears no resemblance to the Assembly of worshippers. And he said not, When ye come together, this is not to eat in common; this is not to feast with one another; but otherwise again and much more fearfully he reprimands them, saying, it is not possible to eat the Lord's Supper, sending them away now from this point to that evening on which Christ delivered the awful Mysteries. Therefore also he called the early meal a supper. For that supper too had them all reclining at meat together: yet surely not so great was the distance between the rich and the poor as between the Teacher and the disciples. For that is infinite. And why say I the Teacher and the disciples? Think of the interval between the Teacher and the traitor: nevertheless, the Lord Himself both sat at meat with them and did not even cast him out, but both gave him his portion of salt and made him partaker of the Mysteries.

Next he explains how it is not possible to eat the Lord's Supper.

1 Corinthians 11:21

For in your eating, each one takes before other his own supper, says he, and one is hungry, and another is drunken.

Do you perceive how he intimates that they were disgracing themselves rather? For that which is the Lord's, they make a private matter: so that themselves are the first to suffer indignity, depriving their own table of its greatest prerogative. How and in what manner? Because the Lord's Supper, i.e. the Master's, ought to be common. For the property of the master belongs not to this servant without belonging to that, but in common to all. So that by the Lord's Supper he expresses this, the community of the feast. As if he had said, If it be your master's, as assuredly it is, you ought not to withdraw it as private, but as belonging to your Lord and Master to set it in common before all. For this is the meaning of, 'the Lord's.' But now thou dost not suffer it to be the Lord's, not suffering it to be common but feasting by yourself. Wherefore also he goes on to say,

For each one takes before other his own supper. And he said not, cuts off, but takes before, tacitly censuring them both for greediness and for precipitancy. This at least the sequel also shows. For having

said this, he added again, and one is hungry, and another is drunken, each of which showed a want of moderation, both the craving and the excess. See also a second fault again whereby those same persons are injured: the first, that they dishonor their supper: the second, that they are greedy and drunken; and what is yet worse, even when the poor are hungry. For what was intended to be set before all in common, that these men fed on alone, and proceeded both to surfeiting and to drunkenness. Wherefore neither did he say, one is hungry, and another is filled: but, is drunken. Now each of these, even by itself, is worthy of censure: for it is a fault to be drunken even without despising the poor; and to despise the poor without being drunken, is an accusation. When both then are joined together at the same time, consider how exceeding great is the transgression.

Next, having pointed out their profaneness, he adds his reprimand in what follows, with much anger, saying,

1 Corinthians 11:22

What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the Church of God, and put them to shame that have not?

Do you see how he transferred the charge from the indignity offered to the poor to the Church, that his words might make a deeper impression of disgust? Here now you see is yet a fourth accusation, when not the poor only, but the Church likewise is insulted. For even as you make the Lord's Supper a private meal, so also the place again, using the Church as a house. For it was made a Church, not that we who come together might be divided, but that they who are divided might be joined: and this act of assembling shows.

And put them to shame that have not. He said not, and kill with hunger them that have not, but so as much more to put them to the blush, shame them; to point out that it is not food which he cares for so much as the wrong done unto them. Behold again a fifth accusation, not only to overlook the poor but even to shame them. Now this he said, partly as treating with reverence the concerns of the poor, and intimating that they grieve not so for the belly as for the shame; and partly also drawing the hearer to compassion.

Having therefore pointed out so great impieties, indignity to the Supper, indignity to the Church, the contempt practised towards the poor; he relaxes again the tones of his reproof, saying, all of a sudden, Shall I praise you? In this I praise you not. Wherein one might especially marvel at him that when there was need to strike and chide more vehemently after the proof of so great offenses, he does the contrary rather, gives way, and permits them to recover breath. What then may the cause be? He had touched more painfully than usual in aggravating the charge, and being a most excellent physician, he adapts the incision to the wounds, neither cutting superficially those parts which require a deep stroke; (for you have heard him how he cut off among those very persons him that had committed fornication;) nor delivering over to the knife those things which require the milder sort of remedies. For this cause then here also he conducts his address more mildly, and in another point of view likewise, he sought especially to render them gentle to the poor: and this is why he discourses with them rather in a subdued tone.

5. Next, wishing also from another topic to shame them yet more, he takes again the points which were most essential and of them weaves his discourse.

1 Corinthians 11:23

For I received of the Lord, says he, that which also I delivered unto you: how that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread:

1 Corinthians 11:24

And when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, Take, eat: this is My Body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

Wherefore does he here make mention of the Mysteries? Because that argument was very necessary to his present purpose. As thus: Your Master, says he, counted all worthy of the same Table, though it be very awful and far exceeding the dignity of all: but you consider them to be unworthy even of your own, small and mean as we see it is; and while they have no advantage over you in spiritual things, you rob them in the temporal things. For neither are these your own.

However, he does not express himself thus, to prevent his discourse becoming harsh: but he frames it in a gentler form, saying, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread.

And wherefore does he remind us of the time, and of that evening, and of the betrayal? Not indifferently nor without some reason, but that he might exceedingly fill them with compunction, were it but from consideration of the time. For even if one be a very stone, yet when he considers that night, how He was with His disciples, very heavy, how He was betrayed, how He was bound, how He was led away, how He was judged, how He suffered all the rest in order, he becomes softer than wax, and is withdrawn from earth and all the pomp of this world. Therefore he leads us to the remembrance of all those things, by His time, and His table, and His betrayal, putting us to shame and saying, Your Master gave up even Himself for you: and thou dost not even share a little meat with your brother for your own sake.

But how says he, that he received it from the Lord? since certainly he was not present then but was one of the persecutors. That you may know that the first table had no advantage above that which comes after it. For even today also it is He who does all, and delivers it even as then.

And not on this account only does he remind us of that night, but that he may also in another way bring us to compunction. For as we particularly remember those words which we hear last from those who are departing; and to their heirs if they should venture to transgress their commands, when we would put them to shame we say, Consider that this was the last word that your father uttered to you, and until the evening when he was just about to breathe his last he kept repeating these injunctions: just so Paul, purposing hence also to make his argument full of awfulness; Remember, says he, that this was the last mysterious rite He gave unto you, and in that night on which He was about to be slain for us, He commanded these things, and having delivered to us that Supper after that He added nothing further.

Next also he proceeds to recount the very things that were done, saying, He took bread, and, when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, Take, eat: this is My Body, which is broken for you. If therefore you come for a sacrifice of thanksgiving, do thou on your part nothing unworthy of that sacrifice: by no means either dishonor your brother, or neglect him in his hunger; be not drunken, insult not the Church. As you come giving thanks for what you have enjoyed: so do you yourself accordingly make return, and not cut yourself off from your neighbor. Since Christ for His part gave equally to all, saying, Take, eat. He gave His Body equally, but dost not thou give so much as the common bread equally? Yea, it was indeed broken for all alike, and became the Body equally for all.

1 Corinthians 11:25

In like manner also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the New Covenant in My Blood: this do, as oft as you drink of it, in remembrance of Me.

What do you say? Are you making a remembrance of Christ, and do you despise the poor and tremblest not? Why, if a son or brother had died and thou were making a remembrance of him, you would have been smitten by your conscience, had you not fulfilled the custom and invited the poor: and when you are making remembrance of your Master, do you not so much as simply give a portion of the Table?

But what is it which He says, This cup is the New Covenant? Because there was also a cup of the Old Covenant; the libations and the blood of the brute creatures. For after sacrificing, they used to receive the blood in a chalice and bowl and so pour it out. Since then instead of the blood of beasts He brought in His own Blood; lest any should be troubled on hearing this, He reminds them of that ancient sacrifice.

6. Next, having spoken concerning that Supper, he connects the things present with the things of that time, that even as on that very evening and reclining on that very couch and receiving from Christ himself this sacrifice, so also now might men be affected; and he says,

1 Corinthians 11:26

For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He come.

For as Christ in regard to the bread and the cup said, Do this in remembrance of Me, revealing to us the cause of the giving of the Mystery, and besides what else He said, declaring this to be a sufficient cause to ground our religious fear upon:-- (for when you consider what your Master has suffered for you, you will the better deny yourself:)-- so also Paul says here: as often as you eat ye do proclaim His death. And this is that Supper. Then intimating that it abides unto the end, he says, till He come.

1 Corinthians 11:27

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and the Blood of the Lord.

Why so? Because he poured it out, and makes the thing appear a slaughter and no longer a sacrifice. Much therefore as they who then pierced Him, pierced Him not that they might drink but that they might shed His blood: so likewise does he that comes for it unworthily and reaps no profit thereby. Do you see how fearful he makes his discourse, and inveighs against them very exceedingly, signifying that if they are thus to drink, they partake unworthily of the elements? For how can it be other than unworthily when it is he who neglects the hungry? Who besides overlooking him puts him to shame? Since if not giving to the poor casts one out of the kingdom, even though one should be a virgin; or rather, not giving liberally: (for even those virgins too had oil, only they had it not abundantly:) consider how great the evil will prove, to have wrought so many impieties?

What impieties? say you. Why do you say, what impieties? You have partaken of such a Table and when you ought to be more gentle than any and like the angels, none so cruel as you have become. You have tasted the Blood of the Lord, and not even thereupon do you acknowledge your brother. Of what indulgence then are you worthy? Whereas if even before this you had not known him, you ought to have come to the knowledge of him from the Table; but now you dishonor the Table itself; he having been

deemed worthy to partake of it and thou not judging him worthy of your meat. Have you not heard how much he suffered who demanded the hundred pence? How he made void the gift vouchsafed to him? Does it not come into your mind what thou were and what you have become? Do you not put yourself in remembrance that if this man be poor in possessions, you were much more beggarly in good works, being full of ten thousand sins? Notwithstanding, God delivered you from all those and counted you worthy of such a Table: but you are not even thus become more merciful: therefore of course nothing else remains but that you should be delivered to the tormentors.

7. These words let us also listen to, all of us, as many as in this place approach with the poor to this holy Table, but when we go out, do not seem even to have seen them, but are both drunken and pass heedlessly by the hungry; the very things whereof the Corinthians were accused. And when is this done? Say you. At all times indeed, but especially at the festivals, where above all times it ought not so to be. Is it not so, that at such times, immediately after Communion, drunkenness succeeds and contempt of the poor? And having partaken of the Blood, when it were a time for you to fast and watch, you give yourself up to wine and revelling. And yet if you have by chance made your morning meal on any thing good, you keep yourself lest by any other unsavory viand thou spoil the taste of the former: and now that you have been feasting on the Spirit you bring in a satanical luxury. Consider, when the Apostles partook of that holy Supper, what they did: did they not betake themselves to prayers and singing of hymns? To sacred vigils? To that long work of teaching, so full of all self-denial? For then He related and delivered to them those great and wonderful things, when Judas had gone out to call them who were about to crucify Him. Have you not heard how the three thousand also who partook of the Communion continued even in prayer and teaching, not in drunken feasts and revellings? But thou before you have partaken fastest, that in a certain way you may appear worthy of the Communion: but when you have partaken, and you ought to increase your temperance, you undo all. And yet surely it is not the same to fast before this and after it. Since although it is our duty to be temperate at both times, yet most particularly after we have received the Bridegroom. Before, that you may become worthy of receiving: after, that you may not be found unworthy of what you have received.

What then? Ought we to fast after receiving? I say not this, neither do I use any compulsion. This indeed were well: however, I do not enforce this, but I exhort you not to feast to excess. For if one never ought to live luxuriously, and Paul showed this when he said, she that gives herself to pleasure is dead while she lives 1 Timothy 5:6; much more will she then be dead. And if luxury be death to a woman, much more to a man: and if this done at another time is fatal, much more after the communion of the Mysteries. And do you having taken the bread of life, do an action of death and not shudder? Do you not know how great evils are brought in by luxury? Unseasonable laughter, disorderly expressions, buffoonery fraught with perdition, unprofitable trifling, all the other things, which it is not seemly even to name. And these things you do when you have enjoyed the Table of Christ, on that day on which you have been counted worthy to touch His flesh with your tongue. What then is to be done to prevent these things? Purify your right hand, your tongue, your lips, which have become a threshold for Christ to tread upon. Consider the time in which you drew near and set forth a material table, raise your mind to that Table, to the Supper of the Lord, to the vigil of the disciples, in that night, that holy night. Nay, rather should one accurately examine, this very present state is night. Let us watch then with the Lord, let us be pricked in our hearts with the disciples. It is the season of prayers, not of drunkenness; ever indeed, but especially during a festival. For a festival is therefore appointed, not that we may behave ourselves unseemly, not that we may accumulate sins, but rather that we may blot out those which exist.

I know, indeed, that I say these things in vain, yet will I not cease to say them. For if you do not all obey, yet surely ye will not all disobey; or rather, even though ye should all be disobedient, my reward will be greater, though yours will be more condemnation. However, that it may not be more, to this end I will not cease to speak. For perchance, perchance, by my perseverance I shall be able to reach you.

Wherefore I beseech you that we do not this to condemnation; let us nourish Christ, let us give Him drink, let us clothe Him. These things are worthy of that Table. Have you heard holy hymns? Have you seen a spiritual marriage? Have you enjoyed a royal Table? Have you been filled with the Holy Ghost? Have you joined in the choir of the Seraphim? Have you become partaker of the powers above? Cast not away so great a joy, waste not the treasure, bring not in drunkenness, the mother of dejection, the joy of the devil, the parent of ten thousand evils. For hence is a sleep like death, and heaviness of head, and disease, and obliviousness, and an image of dead men's condition. Further, if you would not choose to meet with a friend when intoxicated, when you have Christ within, dared thou, tell me, to thrust in upon Him so great an excess?

But do you love enjoyment? Then, on this very account cease being drunken. For I, too, would have you enjoy yourself, but with the real enjoyment, that which never fades. What then is the real enjoyment, ever blooming? Invite Christ to sup Revelation 2:20 with you; give Him to partake of yours, or rather of His own. This brings pleasure without limit, and in its prime everlastingly. But the things of sense are not such; rather as soon as they appear they vanish away; and he that has enjoyed them will be in no better condition than he who has not, or rather in a worse. For the one is settled as it were in a harbor, but the other exposes himself to a kind of torrent, a besieging army of distempers, and has not even any power to endure the first swell of the sea.

That these things be therefore not so, let us follow after moderation. For thus we shall both be in a good state of body, and we shall possess our souls in security, and shall be delivered from evils both present and future: from which may we all be delivered, and attain unto the kingdom, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, power, and honor, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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