

1 Corinthians 11:28

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of self-examination, approaching the Mysteries with a pure conscience, and enduring evil with patience and faith.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:29-34

Topics: "Self Examination", "Holy Communion"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of self-examination before partaking in the Mysteries, emphasizing the need to approach with a pure conscience and reverence, not out of tradition or obligation. He warns against partaking unworthily, as it brings judgment upon oneself, especially for not discerning the Lord's body and underestimating the weight of the gift. Chrysostom highlights the consequences of unworthy participation, such as weakness, sickness, and even death, attributing these to a lack of self-discernment and acknowledgment of sin. He encourages believers to examine themselves, acknowledge their offenses, and condemn their wrongdoings to avoid judgment and receive correction from the Lord.

Transcript

But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup.

What mean these words, when another object is proposed to us? This is Paul's custom, as also I said before, not only to treat of those things which he had proposed to himself, but also if an argument incidental to his purpose occur, to proceed upon this also with great diligence, and especially when it relates to very necessary and urgent matters. Thus, when he was discoursing with married persons, and the question about the servants fell in his way, he handled it very strenuously and at great length. Again, when he was speaking of the duty of not going to law before those courts, then also having fallen upon the admonition respecting covetousness, he discoursed at length concerning this subject likewise. Now the same thing he has also done here: in that having once found occasion to remind them of the Mysteries, he judged it necessary to proceed with that subject. For indeed it was no ordinary one. Wherefore also he discoursed very awfully concerning it, providing for that which is the sum of all good things, viz. their approaching those Mysteries with a pure conscience. Whence neither was he content with the things said before alone, but adds these also, saying,

But let a man prove himself: which also he says in the second Epistle: try your own selves, prove your own selves: 2 Corinthians 13:5 not as we do now, approaching because of the season rather than from any

earnestness of mind. For we do not consider how we may approach prepared, with the ills that were within us purged out, and full of compunction, but how we may come at festivals and whenever all do so. But not thus did Paul bid us come: he knows only one season of access and communion, the purity of a man's conscience. Since if even that kind of banquet which the senses take cognizance of cannot be partaken of by us when feverish and full of bad humors, without risk of perishing: much more is it unlawful for us to touch this Table with profane lusts, which are more grievous than fevers. Now when I say profane lusts, I mean both those of the body, and of money, and of anger, and of malice, and, in a word, all that are profane. And it becomes him that approaches, first to empty himself of all these things and so to touch that pure sacrifice. And neither if indolently disposed and reluctantly ought he to be compelled to approach by reason of the festival; nor, on the other hand, if penitent and prepared, should any one prevent him because it is not a festival. For a festival is a showing forth of good works, and a reverence of soul, and exactness of deportment. And if you have these things, you may at all times keep festival and at all times approach. Wherefore he says, But let each man prove himself, and then let him approach. And he bids not one examine another, but each himself, making the tribunal not a public one and the conviction without a witness.

1 Corinthians 11:29

2. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself.

What do you say, tell me? Is this Table which is the cause of so many blessings and teeming with life, become judgment? Not from its own nature, says he, but from the will of him that approaches. For as His presence, which conveyed to us those great and unutterable blessings, condemned the more them that received it not: so also the Mysteries become provisions of greater punishment to such as partake unworthily.

But why does he eat judgment to himself? Not discerning the Lord's body: i.e., not searching, not bearing in mind, as he ought, the greatness of the things set before him; not estimating the weight of the gift. For if you should come to know accurately Who it is that lies before you, and Who He is that gives Himself, and to whom, you will need no other argument, but this is enough for you to use all vigilance; unless you should be altogether fallen.

1 Corinthians 11:30

For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep.

Here he no longer brings his examples from others as he did in the case of the idol-sacrifices, relating the ancient histories and the chastisements in the wilderness, but from the Corinthians themselves; which also made the discourse apt to strike them more keenly. For whereas he was saying, he eats judgment to himself, and, he is guilty; that he might not seem to speak mere words, he points to deeds also and calls themselves to witness; a kind of thing which comes home to men more than threatening, by showing that the threat has issued in some real fact. He was not however content with these things alone, but from these he also introduced and confirmed the argument concerning hell-fire, terrifying them in both ways; and solving an inquiry which is handled everywhere. I mean, since many question one with another, whence arise the untimely deaths, whence the long diseases of men; he tells them that these unexpected events are many of them conditional upon certain sins. What then? They who are in continual health, say you, and come to a green old age, do they not sin? Nay, who dared say this? How then, say you, do they not suffer punishment? Because there they shall suffer a severer one. But we, if we would, neither here

nor there need suffer it.

1 Corinthians 11:31

For if we discerned ourselves, says he, we should not be judged.

And he said not, if we punished ourselves, if we were revenged on ourselves, but if we were only willing to acknowledge our offense, to pass sentence on ourselves, to condemn the things done amiss, we should be rid of the punishment both in this world and the next. For he that condemns himself propitiates God in two ways, both by acknowledging his sins, and by being more on his guard for the future. But since we are not willing to do even this light thing, as we ought to do it, not even thus does He endure to punish us with the world, but even thus spares us, exacting punishment in this world, where the penalty is for a season and the consolation great; for the result is both deliverance from sins, and a good hope of things to come, alleviating the present evils. And these things he says, at the same time comforting the sick and rendering the rest more serious. Wherefore he says,

1 Corinthians 11:32

But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord.

He said not, we are punished, he said not, we have vengeance taken on us, but, we are chastened. For what is done belongs rather to admonition than condemnation, to healing than vengeance, to correction than punishment. And not so only but by the threat of a greater evil he makes the present light, saying, that we may not be condemned with the world. Do you see how he brings in hell also and that tremendous judgment-seat, and signifies that that trial and punishment is necessary and by all means must be? For if the faithful, and such as God especially cares for, escape not without punishment in whatsoever things they offend, (and this is evident from things present,) much more the unbelieving and they who commit the unpardonable and incurable sins.

1 Corinthians 11:33

3. Wherefore when you come together to eat, wait one for another.

Thus, while their fear was yet at its height and the terror of hell remained, he chooses again to bring in also the exhortation in behalf of the poor, on account of which he said all these things; implying that if they do not this they must partake unworthily. But if the not imparting of our goods excludes from that Table, much more the violently taking away. And he said not, wherefore, when you come together, impart to them that need, but, which has a more reverential sound, wait one for another. For this also prepared the way for and intimated that, and in a becoming form introduced the exhortation. Then further to shame them,

1 Corinthians 11:34

And if any man is hungry, let him eat at home.

By permitting, he hinders it, and more strongly than by an absolute prohibition. For he brings him out of the church and sends him to his house, hereby severely reprimanding and ridiculing them, as slaves to the belly and unable to contain themselves. For he said not, if any despise the poor, but, if any hunger, discoursing as with impatient children; as with brute beasts which are slaves to appetite. Since it would be indeed very ridiculous, if, because they were hungry they were to eat at home.

Yet he was not content with this, but added also another more fearful thing, saying, that your coming together be not unto judgment: that you come not unto chastisement, unto punishment, insulting the Church, dishonoring your brother. For for this cause ye come together, says he, that you may love one another, that you may profit and be profited. But if the contrary happen, it were better for you to feed yourselves at home.

This, however, he said, that he might attract them to him the more. Yea, this was the very purpose both of his pointing out the injury that would arise from hence, and of his saying that condemnation was no trifling one, and terrifying them in every way, by the Mysteries, by the sick, by those that had died, by the other things before mentioned.

Then also he alarms them again in another way, saying, and the rest will I set in order whenever I come: with reference either to some other things, or to this very matter. For since it was likely that they would yet have some reasons to allege, and it was not possible to set all to rights by letter, the things which I have charged you, let them be observed for the present, says he; but if you have any thing else to mention, let it be kept for my coming; speaking either of this matter, as I said, or of some other things not very urgent. And this he does that hence too he may render them more serious. For being anxious about his coming, they would correct the error. For the sojourning of Paul in any place was no ordinary thing: and to signify this he said, some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you; 1 Corinthians 4:18 and elsewhere again, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Philippians 2:12 And therefore neither did he merely promise that he would come, lest they should disbelieve him and become more negligent; but he also states a necessary cause for his sojourning with them, saying, the rest I will set in order when I come; which implies, that the correction of the things that remained, even had he not in any case been desirous, would have drawn him there.

4. Hearing therefore all these things, let us both take great care of the poor, and restrain our appetite, and rid ourselves of drunkenness, and be careful worthily to partake of the Mysteries; and whatsoever we suffer, let us not take it bitterly, neither for ourselves nor for others; as when untimely death happen or long diseases. For this is deliverance from punishment, this is correction, this is most excellent admonition. Who says this? He that has Christ speaking in him.

But nevertheless even after this many of our women are so foolishly disposed as even to go beyond the unbelievers in the excess of their grief. And some do this blinded by their passion, but others for ostentation, and to avoid the censures of them that are without: who most of all are deprived of excuse, to my mind. For, lest such a one accuse me, says she, let God be my accuser: lest men more senseless than the brute beasts condemn me, let the law of the King of all be trampled under foot. Why, how many thunderbolts do not these sayings deserve?

Again; If any one invite you to a funeral supper after your affliction there is no one to say any thing against it, because there is a law of men which enjoins such things: but when God by His law forbids your mourning, all thus contradict it. Does not Job come into your mind, O woman? Rememberest thou not his words at the misfortune of his children, which adorned that holy head more than ten thousand crowns, and made proclamation louder than many trumpets? Do you make no account of the greatness of his misfortunes, of that unprecedented shipwreck, and that strange and portentous tragedy? For thou possibly hast lost one, or a second, or third: but he so many sons and daughters: and he that had many children suddenly became childless. And not even by degrees were his bowels wasted away: but at one sweep all the fruit of his body was snatched from him. Nor was it by the common law of nature, when they had come

to old age, but by a death both untimely and violent: and all together, and when he was not present nor sitting by them, that at least by hearing their last words he might have some consolation for so bitter an end of theirs: but contrary to all expectation and without his knowing any thing of what took place, they were all at once overwhelmed, and their house became their grave and their snare.

And not only their untimely death, but many things besides there were to grieve him; such as their being all in the flower of their age, all virtuous and loving, all together, that not one of either sex was left, that it befell them not by the common law of nature, that it came after so great a loss, that when he was unconscious of any sin on his own part or on theirs, he suffered these things. For each of these circumstances is enough even by itself to disturb the mind: but when we find them even concurring together, imagine the height of those waves, how great the excess of that storm. And what in particular is greater and worse than his bereavement, he did not even know wherefore all these things happened. On this account then, having no cause to assign for the misfortune, he ascends to the good pleasure of God, and says, The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away: as it pleased the Lord, even so it happened; blessed be the name of the Lord forever. Job 2:21 And these things he said, when he saw himself who had followed after all virtue in the last extremity; but evil men and impostors, prospering, luxurious, revelling on all sides. And he uttered no such word as it is likely that some of the weaker sort would have uttered, Was it for this that I brought up my children and trained them with all exactness? For this did I open my house to all that passed by, that after those many courses run in behalf of the needy, the naked, the orphans, I might receive this recompense? But instead of these, he offered up those words better than all sacrifice, saying, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. If however he rent his clothes and shaved his head, marvel not. For he was a father and a loving father: and it was meet that both the compassion of his nature should be shown, and also the self-command of his spirit. Whereas, had he not done this, perhaps one would have thought this self-command to be of mere insensibility. Therefore he indicates both his natural affection and the exactness of his piety, and in his grief he was not overthrown.

5. Yea, and when his trial proceeded further, he is again adorned with other crowns on account of his reply to his wife, saying, If we have received good at the hand of the Lord, shall we not endure evil? Job 2:10 For in fact his wife was by this time the only one left, all his having been clean destroyed, both his children and his possessions and his very body, and she reserved to tempt and to ensnare him. And this indeed was the reason why the devil did not destroy her with the children, nor asked her death, because he expected that she would contribute much towards the ensnaring of that holy man. Therefore he left her as a kind of implement, and a formidable one, for himself. For if even out of paradise, says he, I cast mankind by her means, much more shall I be able to trip him up on the dunghill.

And observe his craft. He did not apply this stratagem when the oxen or the asses or the camels were lost, nor even when the house fell and the children were buried under it, but so long looking on the combatant, he suffers her to be silent and quiet. But when the fountain of worms gushed forth, when the skin began to putrify and drop off, and the flesh wasting away to emit most offensive discharge, and the hand of the devil was wearing him out with sharper pain than gridirons and furnaces and any flame, consuming on every side and eating away his body more grievously than any wild beast, and when a long time had been spent in this misery ; then he brings her to him, seasoned and worn down. Whereas if she had approached him at the beginning of his misfortune, neither would she have found him so unnerved, nor would she have had it in her power so to swell out and exaggerate the misfortune by her words. But now when she saw him through the length of time thirsting for release, and desiring the termination of what pressed on him

vehemently then does she come upon him. For to show that he was quite worn down, and by this time had become unable even to draw breath, yea, and desired even to die, hear what he says; For I would I could lay hands on myself, or could request another and he should do it for me; And observe, I pray, the wickedness of his wife, from what topic she at once begins: namely, from the length of time, saying, How long will you hold out sittest all night in the open air, while I am a wanderer and a servant, from place to place, and from house to house, awaiting the sun when it will set, that I may rest from my labors and the pains which now straiten me: but say some word against the Lord, and die."-->?

Now, if often even when there were no realities words alone have prevailed to unman a person, consider what it was likely he then should feel, when, besides these words, the things themselves also were galling him; and what, as it should seem, was worst of all, it was a wife also who spoke thus, and a wife who had sunk down utterly and was giving herself up, and on this account was seeking to cast him also into desperation. However, that we may see more clearly the engine which was brought against that adamant wall, let us listen to the very words. What then are these? How long will you hold out? Saying, Lo! I wait a short time longer, expecting the hope of my salvation. Nay, says she, the time has exposed the folly of your words, while it is protracted, yet shows no mode of escape. And these things she said, not only thrusting him into desperation, but also reproaching and jesting upon him.

For he, ever consoling her as she pressed upon him, and putting her off, would speak as follows: Wait a little longer, and there will soon be an end of these things. Reproaching him therefore, she speaks: Will you now again say the same thing? For a long time has now run by, and no end of these things has appeared. And observe her malice, that she makes no mention of the oxen, the sheep or the camels, as knowing that he was not very much vexed about these; but she goes at once to nature, and reminds him of his children. For on their death she saw him both rending his clothes and shaving off his hair. And she said not, your children are dead, but very pathetically, your memorial is perished from the earth, the thing for which your children were desirable. For if, even now after that the resurrection has been made known children are longed for because they preserve the memory of the departed; much more then. Wherefore also her curse becomes from that consideration more bitter. For in that case, he that cursed, said not, Let his children be utterly rooted out, but, his memorial from the earth. Your sons and your daughters. Thus whereas she said, the memorial, she again accurately makes mention of either sex. But if you, says she, carest not for these, at least consider what is mine. The pains of my womb, and labors which I have endured in vain with sorrow. Now what she means is this: I, who endured the more, am wronged for your sake, and having undergone the toils I am deprived of the fruits.

And see how she neither makes express mention of his loss of property, nor is silent about it and hurries by; but in that point of view in which it also might be most pathetically narrated, in that she covertly refers to it. For when she says, I too am a vagabond and a slave, going about from place to place, from house to house, she both hints at the loss and indicates her great distress: these expressions being such as even to enhance that misfortune. For I come to the doors of others, says she; nor do I beg only, but am a wanderer also and serve a strange and unusual servitude, going round everywhere and carrying about the tokens of my calamity, and teaching all men of my woes; which is most piteous of all, to change house after house. And she stayed not even at these lamentations, but proceeded to say, Waiting for the sun when it will set, and I shall rest from my miseries and the pains that encompass me, by which I am now straitened. Thus, that which is sweet to others, says she, to behold the light, this to me is grievous: but the night and the darkness is a desirable thing. For this only gives me rest from my toils, this becomes a comfort to my miseries. But speak somewhat against the Lord, and die. Perceivest thou here too her crafty

wickedness? How she did not even in the act of advising at once introduce the deadly counsel, but having first pitifully related her misfortunes and having drawn out the tragedy at length, she couches in a few words what she would recommend, and does not even declare it plainly, but throwing a shade over that, she holds out to him the deliverance which he greatly longed for, and promises death, the thing which he then most of all desired.

And mark from this also the malice of the devil: that because he knew the longing of Job towards God, he suffers not his wife to accuse God, lest he should at once turn away from her as an enemy. For this cause she no where mentions Him, but the actual calamities she is continually harping on.

And do thou, besides what has been said, add the circumstance that it was a woman who gave this counsel, a wonderful orator to beguile the heedless. Many at least even without external accidents have been cast down by the counsel of woman alone.

6. What then did the blessed saint, and firmer than adamant? Looking bitterly upon her, by his aspect even before he spoke, he repelled her devices: since she no doubt expected to excite fountains of tears; but he became fiercer than a lion, full of wrath and indignation, not on account of his sufferings, but on account of her diabolical suggestions; and having signified his anger by his looks in a subdued tone he gives his rebuke; for even in misfortune he kept his self-command. And what says he? Why do you speak as one of the foolish women? I have not so taught you, says he, I did not so nurture you; and this is why I do not now recognize even my own consort. For these words are the counsel of a 'foolish woman,' and of one beside herself. Seest thou not here an instance of wounding in moderation, and inflicting a blow just sufficient to cure the disease?

Then, after the infliction, he brings in advice sufficient on the other hand to console her, and very rational, thus speaking: if we have received our good things at the hand of the Lord, shall we not endure our evils? For remember, says he, those former things and make account of the Author of them, and you will bear even these nobly. Do you see the modesty of the man? That he does not at all impute his patience to his own courage, but says it was part of the natural result of what happened. For in return for what did God give us these former things? What recompense did he repay? None, but from mere goodness. For they were a gift, not a recompense; a grace, not a reward. Well then, let us bear these also nobly.

This discourse let us, both men and women, have recorded, and let us engrave the words in our minds, both these and those before them: and by sketching upon our minds as in picture the history of their sufferings, I mean the loss of wealth, the bereavement of children, the disease of body, the reproaches, the mockings, the devices of his wife, the snare of the devil, in a word, all the calamities of that righteous man, and that with exactness, let us provide ourselves with a most ample port of refuge: that, enduring all things nobly and thankfully, we may both in the present life cast off all despondency, and receive the rewards that belong to this good way of taking things; by the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom to the Father, with the Holy Ghost, be glory, power, and honor, now and forever, world without end. Amen.

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