

1 Timothy 3:8-10

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the qualities of Deacons and Deaconesses, and the mystery of godliness, which is God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Godly Living"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the qualities and responsibilities of Deacons and Deaconesses, emphasizing the importance of being blameless, sober, hospitable, and faithful. He highlights the need for them to hold the mystery of faith with a pure conscience and to rule their households well. Chrysostom also discusses the mystery of godliness, focusing on the incarnation of God, His ascension, and the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles. He urges the congregation to prioritize heavenly treasures over worldly wealth, reminding them of the eternal value of virtues like charity and almsgiving.

Transcript

Likewise must the Deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given much to wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved: then let them use the office of a Deacon, being found blameless.

Likewise the Deacons. That is, they should have the same qualities as Bishops. And what are these same? To be blameless, sober, hospitable, patient, not brawlers, not covetous. And that he means this when he says likewise, is evident from what he says in addition, grave, not doubletongued; that is, not hollow or deceitful. For nothing so debases a man as deceit, nothing is so pernicious in the Church as insincerity. Not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. Thus he explains what he means by blameless. And here he requires, though in other words, that he be not a novice, where he says, Let these also first be proved, where the conjunction also is added, as connecting this with what had been said before of Bishops, for nothing intervenes between. And there is the same reason for the not a novice in that case. For would it not be absurd, that when a newly purchased slave is not entrusted with anything in a house, till he has by long trial given proofs of his character, yet that one should enter into the Church of God from a state of heathenism, and be at once placed in a station of preeminence?

Ver. 11. Even so must the women be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

Some have thought that this is said of women generally, but it is not so, for why should he introduce anything about women to interfere with his subject? He is speaking of those who hold the rank of Deaconesses.

Ver. 12. Let the Deacons be husbands of one wife.

This must be understood therefore to relate to Deaconesses. For that order is necessary and useful and honorable in the Church. Observe how he requires the same virtue from the Deacons, as from the Bishops, for though they were not of equal rank, they must equally be blameless; equally pure.

Ruling their children and their own houses well.

Ver. 13. For they that have used the office of a Deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and much boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Everywhere they are required to rule their children well, that others may not be scandalized by their misconduct.

They that use the office of a Deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree, that is, advancement, and much boldness in the faith of Jesus Christ; as if he would say, that those who have been found vigilant in the lower degree will soon ascend to the higher.

Ver. 14, 15. These things write I unto you, hoping to come unto you shortly. But if I tarry long, that you may know how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

That he may not plunge Timothy into dejection by giving him orders about such matters, he says, I write thus not as though I were not coming, but I will indeed come, still in case I should be delayed, that you may not be distressed. And this he writes to him to prevent his being dejected, but to others in order to rouse them to greater earnestness. For his presence, though only promised, would have great effect. Nor let it seem strange that, though foreseeing everything through the Spirit, he was yet ignorant of this, and only says, I hope to come, but if I tarry, which implies uncertainty. For since he was led by the Spirit, and did not act from his own inclination, he was naturally uncertain about this matter.

That you may know, he says, how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. Not like that Jewish house. For it is this that maintains the faith and the preaching of the Word. For the truth is the pillar and the ground of the Church.

Ver. 16. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God [He who] was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit.

Here he speaks of the Dispensation in our behalf. Tell me not of the bells, nor of the holy of holies, nor of the high priest. The Church is the pillar of the world. Consider this mystery, and you may be struck with awe: for it is indeed a great mystery, and a mystery of godliness, and that without controversy or question, for it is beyond all doubt. Since in his directions to the Priests he had required nothing like what is found in Leviticus he refers the whole matter to Another, saying, God was manifest in the flesh. The Creator was seen incarnate. He was justified in the Spirit. As it is said, Wisdom is justified of her children, or because He practiced no guile, as the Prophet says, Because he had done no violence, neither was guile found in his mouth. Isaiah 53:9; 1 Peter 2:22 Seen of Angels. So that Angels together with us saw the Son of God,

not having before seen Him. Great, truly great, was this mystery! Preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world. He was heard of and believed in through all parts of the world, as the Prophet foreshowed, saying, Their sound is gone out into all the world. Psalm 19:4 Think not that these things are mere words, for they are not, but full of hidden realities. Received up into glory. He ascended upon clouds. This Jesus, it is said, Who is taken up from you, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven. Acts 1:11

The discretion of the blessed Paul is observable. When he would exhort the Deacons to avoid excess in wine, he does not say, Be not drunken, but not even given to much wine. A proper caution; for if those who served in the Temple did not taste wine at all, much more should not these. For wine produces disorder of mind, and where it does not cause drunkenness, it destroys the energies and relaxes the firmness of the soul.

The dispensation in our behalf he calls a mystery, and well may it be so called, since it is not manifest to all, nay, it was not manifest to the Angels, for how could it, when it was made known by the Church? Ephesians 3:10 Therefore he says, without controversy great is the mystery. Great indeed was it. For God became Man, and Man became God. A Man was seen without sin! A Man was received up, was preached in the world! Together with us the Angels saw Him. This is indeed a mystery! Let us not then expose this mystery. Let us not lay it forth everywhere, but let us live in a manner worthy of the mystery. They to whom a mystery is entrusted are great persons. We account it a mark of favor, if a king entrusts a secret to us. But God has committed His mystery to us, yet are we ungrateful to our Benefactor, as if we had not received the greatest benefits. Our insensibility to such a kindness should strike us with horror. And how is that a mystery which all know? In the first place all do not know it, and before then too they knew it not, but now it is made manifest.

Moral. In keeping this mystery, then, let us be faithful to our trust. So great a mystery has He entrusted to us, and we do not trust Him even with our money, though He has bid us lay up our wealth with Him, where none can take it away, neither can moth nor thief waste it. And He promises to pay us a hundred-fold, yet we obey Him not. Yet here if we entrust any with a deposit, we receive nothing back in addition, but are thankful if that is restored which we deposited. If a thief steals it there, He says, set that to My account; I say not to you, a thief has taken it, or moth devoured it. He repays a hundred-fold here, and eternal life is superadded hereafter, yet do we not lay up our treasure there! But, you say, He repays slowly. Well this too is a proof of the greatness of His gift, that He does not repay here in this mortal life; or rather He does repay even here a hundred-fold. For did not Paul leave here his tools, Peter his rod and hook, and Matthew his seat of custom? And was not the whole world opened to them more than to kings? Were not all things laid at their feet? Were they not appointed rulers, and lords? Did not men commit their lives into their hands? suspend themselves wholly upon their counsel, and enlist in their service? And do we not see many similar occurrences even now? Many men of poor and humble means, who did but handle the spade, and had hardly a sufficiency of necessary food, having but the character of monks, have been celebrated above all men, and honored of kings.

Are these things inconsiderable? Well, consider that these are but additions, the principal sum is stored up for the life to come. Despise riches, if you would have riches. If you would be truly rich, become poor. For such are the paradoxes of God. He would not have you rich from your own care, but from His grace. Leave these things to Me, He says; make spiritual things your concern, that you may know My power. Flee from that yoke of slavery, which riches impose. As long as you cleave to them, you are poor. When you despise them, you are doubly rich, in that such things shall flow in upon you from every side, and in that

you shall want none of those things, which the multitude want. For not to possess much, but to need little, is to be rich indeed. The king, so long as he wants anything, differs not from the poor man. For this is poverty, to stand in need of others; and by this argument the king is poor, in so far as he stands in need of his subjects. But he that is crucified, to the world is not so; he wants for nothing; for his hands are sufficient for his subsistence, as Paul said, These hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me. Acts 20:34 These are his words who says, As having nothing, yet possessing all things. 2 Corinthians 6:20 This is he who was thought a God by the inhabitants of Lystra. If you would obtain worldly things, seek Heaven; if you would enjoy things here, despise them. For, Seek first the kingdom of God, He says, and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6:33

Why do you admire these trifles? Why long for things of no real worth? How long is one poor? how long a beggar? Raise your eyes to heaven, think of the riches there, and smile at gold; think of how little use it is; that the enjoyment of it lasts but for the present life, and that compared with eternity, the present life is as a grain of sand, or as a drop of water to the boundless ocean. This wealth is not a possession, it is not property, it is a loan for use. For when you die, willingly or unwillingly, all that you have goes to others, and they again give it up to others, and they again to others. For we are all sojourners; and the tenant of the house is more truly perchance the owner of it, for the owner dies, and the tenant lives, and still enjoys the house. And if the latter hires it, the other might be said to hire it too: for he built it, and was at pains with it, and fitted it up. Property, in fact, is but a word: we are all owners in fact but of other men's possessions. Those things only are our own, which we have sent before us to the other world. Our goods here are not our own; we have only a life interest in them; or rather they fail us during our lives. Only the virtues of the soul are properly our own, as almsgiving and charity. Worldly goods, even by those without, were called external things, because they are without us. But let us make them internal. For we cannot take our wealth with us, when we depart hence, but we can take our charities. But let us rather send them before us, that they may prepare for us an abode in the eternal mansions. Luke 16:9

Goods are named from use, not from lordship, and are not our own, and possessions are not a property but a loan. For how many masters has every estate had, and how many will it have! There is a sensible proverb, (and popular proverbs, when they contain any wisdom, are not to be despised,) O field, how many men's have you been, and how many men's will you be? This we should say to our houses and all our goods. Virtue alone is able to depart with us, and to accompany us to the world above. Let us then give up and extinguish that love of wealth, that we may kindle in us an affection for heavenly things. These two affections cannot possess one soul. For it is said, Either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Matthew 6:24 Do you see a man with a long train of attendants, clearing a way along the streets, clothed in silken garments, riding aloft, and stiffening his neck? Be not overawed, but smile. As we laugh when we see children playing at kings, so laugh at his state, for it is no better than theirs, nor indeed so pleasant, for there is not the same innocence and simplicity as with children. With them it is laughter and pleasure, here is a man made ridiculous and contemptible.

Glorify God, Who has kept you free from this theatrical ostentation. For, if you will, humble as your station is, you may be higher than he who is exalted in his chariot. And why? Because, though his body is a little raised from the earth, his soul is fixed upon it, for My strength, he says, cleaves to my flesh Psalm 102:6, but thou in your spirit walkest in heaven. What though he has many attendants clearing his way? Is he more honored by this than his horse? And what an absurdity is it, to drive men before one to clear the way for a beast to pass! Then what sort of honor is it to bestride a horse? An honor shared by his slaves. Yet

some are so vain of this, that they have it led after them even though they do not want it. What greater folly can there be? To wish to be distinguished by their horses, by the costliness of their garments, by their retinue! What can be more contemptible than glory which consists in horses, and servants? Are you virtuous? Use not such distinctions. Have ornaments in yourself. Be not indebted for your glory to the presence of others. To such honor the most wicked, corrupt, and base of men may attain; all indeed who are rich. Actors and dancers may ride on horseback with a servant running before them, yet are they but actors and dancers still. Their horses and attendants procure them no respect. For when the graces of the soul are wanting to such persons, the addition of these external things is superfluous and vain. And as when a wall is weak, or a body disordered, whatever you put upon it, it still remains unsound and decayed; so in this case; the soul continues the same, and receives no advantage from things without, not though the man wear a thousand ornaments of gold. Let us not therefore be anxious for such things. Let us withdraw ourselves from temporal things, and pursue greater, even spiritual distinctions, which will render us truly objects of veneration, that we also may obtain the blessings of futurity, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom, etc.

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