

Homily 10 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 10 on Ephesians emphasizes the necessity of unity in the Church and the dangers of pride and disunity among its members.

Scripture: Isaiah 43:26, Jonah 3:10, Romans 16:20, Ephesians 4:4, Philippians 2:5

Topics: "Church Unity", "Repentance"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of unity in the Church, drawing parallels between the body of believers and the physical body, highlighting the need for each member to fulfill their role without envy or pride. He warns against the destructive nature of seeking personal glory and honor within the Church, likening it to a consuming fire that threatens the spiritual well-being of all. Chrysostom urges repentance, fasting, and a turning away from selfish desires, calling for a collective effort to seek God's mercy and restoration for the Church.

Transcript

Ephesians 4:4

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling.

When the blessed Paul exhorts us to anything of special importance, so truly wise and spiritual as he is, he grounds his exhortation upon things in Heaven: this itself being a lesson he had learned from the Lord. Thus he says also elsewhere, Walk in love, even as Christ also has loved us. Ephesians 5:2 And again, Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God. Philippians 2:5-6 This is what he is doing here also, for whenever the examples he is setting before us are great, he is intense in his zeal and feeling. What then does he say, now he is inciting us to unity? There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling:

Ver. 5. One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Now what is this one body? The faithful throughout the whole world, both which are, and which have been, and which shall be. And again, they that before Christ's coming pleased God, are one body. How so? Because they also knew Christ. Whence does this appear? Your father Abraham, says He, rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad. John 8:56 And again, If you had believed Moses, He says, ye would

have believed Me, for he wrote of Me. John 5:46 And the prophets too would not have written of One, of whom they knew not what they said; whereas they both knew Him, and worshipped Him. Thus then were they also one body.

The body is not disjoined from the spirit, for then would it not be a body. Thus it is customary also with us, touching things which are united, and which have any great consistency or coherence, to say, they are one body. And thus again, touching union, we take that to be a body which is under one head. If there be one head, then is there one body. The body is composed of members both honorable and dishonorable. Only the greater is not to rise up even against the meanest, nor this latter to envy the other. They do not all indeed contribute the same share, but severally according to the proportion of need. And forasmuch as all are formed for necessary and for different purposes, all are of equal honor. Some indeed there are, which are more especially principal members, others less so: for example, the head is more a principal member than all the rest of the body, as containing within itself all the senses, and the governing principle of the soul. And to live without the head is impossible; whereas many persons have lived for a long time with their feet cut off. So that it is better than they, not only by its position, but also by its very vital energy and its function.

Now why am I saying this? There are great numbers in the Church; there are those who, like the head, are raised up to a height; who, like the eyes that are in the head, survey heavenly things, who stand far aloof from the earth, and have nothing in common with it, while others occupy the rank of feet, and tread upon the earth; of healthy feet indeed, for to tread upon the earth is no crime in feet, but to run to evil. Their feet, says the Prophet, run to evil. Isaiah 59:7 Neither then let these, the head, says he, be high-minded against the feet, nor the feet look with evil eye at them. For thus the peculiar beauty of each is destroyed, and the perfectness of its function impeded. And naturally enough; inasmuch as he who lays snares for his neighbor will be laying snares first of all for himself. And should the feet therefore not choose to convey the head anywhere upon its necessary journey, they will at the same time be injuring themselves by their inactivity and sloth. Or again, should the head not choose to take any care of the feet, itself will be the first to sustain the damage. However, those members do not rise up one against the other; it is not likely, for it has been so ordered by nature that they should not. But with man, how is it possible for him not to rise up against man? No one, we know, ever rises up against Angels; since neither do they rise against the Archangels. Nor, on the other hand, can the irrational creatures proudly exalt themselves over us; but where the nature is equal in dignity, and the gift one, and where one has no more than another, how shall this be prevented?

And yet surely these are the very reasons why you ought not to rise up against your neighbors. For if all things are common, and one has nothing more than another, whence this mad folly? We partake of the same nature, partake alike of soul and body, we breathe the same air, we use the same food. Whence this rebellious rising of one against another? And yet truly the being able by one's virtue to overcome the incorporeal powers, that were enough to lead to arrogance; or rather arrogance it would not be, for with good reason am I high-minded, and exceedingly high-minded against the evil spirit. And behold even Paul, how high-minded he was against that evil spirit. For when the evil spirit was speaking great and marvelous things concerning him, he made him hold his peace, and endured him not even in his flattery. For when that damsel, who had the spirit of divination, cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation Acts 16:16-17, he rebuked him severely, and silenced his forward tongue. And again he elsewhere writes, and says, God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. Romans 16:20 Will the difference of nature have any effect? Perceivest thou not that the

difference between natures has no effect whatever, but only the difference of purpose? Because of their principle therefore they are far worse than all. Well, a man may say, but I am not rising up against an Angel, because there is so vast a distance between my nature and his. And yet surely you ought no more to rise up against a man than against an Angel, for the Angel indeed differs from you in nature, a matter which can be neither an honor to him, nor a disgrace to you: whereas man differs from man not at all in nature, but in principle; and there is such a thing as an Angel too even among men. So that if you rise not up against Angels, much more should you not against men, against those who have become angels in this our nature; for should any one among men become as virtuous as an Angel, that man is in a far higher degree superior to you, than an Angel is. And why so? Because what the one possesses by nature, the other has achieved of his own purpose. And again, because the Angel has his home far from you in distance also, and dwells in Heaven; whereas this man is living with you, and giving an impulse to your emulation. And indeed he lives farther apart from you than the Angel. For our citizenship, says the Apostle, is in Heaven. Philippians 3:20 And to show you that this man has his home still farther distant, hear where his Head is seated; upon the throne, says he, the royal throne! And the farther distant that throne is from us, the farther is he also.

Well, but I see him, you will say, in the enjoyment of honor, and I am led to jealousy. Why, this is the very thing which has turned all things upside down, which has filled not the world only, but the Church also, with countless troubles. And just as fierce blasts setting in across a calm harbor, render it more dangerous than any rock, or than any strait whatever; so the lust of glory entering in, overturns and confounds everything.

You have oftentimes been present at the burning of large houses. You have seen how the smoke keeps rising up to Heaven; and if no one comes near to put a stop to the mischief, but every one keeps looking to himself, the flame spreads freely on, and devours everything. And oftentimes the whole city will stand around; they will stand round indeed as spectators of the evil, not to aid nor assist. And there you may see them one and all standing round, and doing nothing but each individual stretching out his hand, and pointing out to some one who may be just come to the spot, either a flaming brand that moment flying through a window, or beams hurled down, or the whole circuit of the walls forced out, and tumbling violently to the ground. Many too there are of the more daring and venturesome, who will have the hardihood even to come close to the very buildings themselves while they are burning, not in order to stretch forth a hand towards them, and to put a stop to the mischief, but that they may the more fully enjoy the sight, being able from the nearer place to observe closely all that which often escapes those at a distance. Then if the house happen to be large and magnificent, it appears to them a pitiable spectacle, and deserving of many tears. And truly there is a pitiable spectacle for us to behold; capitals of columns crumbled to dust, and many columns themselves shattered to pieces, some consumed by the fire, others thrown down often by the very hands which erected them, that they may not add fuel to the flame. Statues again, which stood with so much gracefulness, with the ceiling resting on them, these you may see all exposed, with the roof torn off, and themselves standing hideously disfigured in the open air. And why should one go on to describe the wealth stored up within? The tissues of gold, and the vessels of silver? And where the lord of the house and his consort scarcely entered, where was the treasurehouse of tissues and perfumes, and the caskets of the costly jewels -- all has become one blazing fire, and within now, are bath-men and street-cleaners, and runaway slaves, and everybody; and everything within is one mass of fire and water, of mud, and dust, and half-burnt beams!

Now why have I drawn out so full a picture as this? Not simply because I wish to represent to you the conflagration of a house, (for what concern is that of mine?) but because I wish to set before your eyes, as vividly as I can, the calamities of the Church. For like a conflagration indeed, or like a thunderbolt hurled from on high, have they lighted upon the roof of the Church, and yet they rouse up no one; but while our Father's house is burning, we are sleeping, as it were, a deep and stupid sleep.

And yet who is there whom this fire does not touch? Which of the statues that stand in the Church? For the Church is nothing else than a house built of the souls of us men. Now this house is not of equal honor throughout, but of the stones which contribute to it, some are bright and shining, while others are smaller and more dull than they, and yet superior again to others. There we may see many who are in the place of gold also, the gold which adorns the ceiling. Others again we may see, who give the beauty and gracefulness produced by statues.

Many we may see, standing like pillars. For he is accustomed to call men also pillars Galatians 2:9, not only on account of their strength but also on account of their beauty, adding as they do, much grace, and having their heads overlaid with gold. We may see a multitude, forming generally the wide middle space and the whole extent of the circumference; for the body at large occupies the place of those stones of which the outer walls are built. Or rather we must go on to a more splendid picture yet.

This Church, of which I speak, is not built of these stones, such as we see around us, but of gold and silver, and of precious stones, and there is abundance of gold dispersed everywhere throughout it. But, oh the bitter tears this calls forth! For all these things has the lawless rule of vainglory consumed; that all-devouring flame, which no one has yet got under. And we stand gazing in amazement at the flames, but no longer able to quench the evil: or if we do quench it for a short time, yet after two or three days as a spark blown up from a heap of ashes overturns all, and consumes no less than it did before, so it is here also: for this is just what is wont to happen in such a conflagration.

And as to the cause, it has devoured the supports of the very pillars of the Church; those of us who supported the roof, and who formerly held the whole building together it has enveloped in the flame. Hence too was a ready communication to the rest of the outer walls: for so also in the case of buildings, when the fire lays hold of the timbers, it is better armed for its attack upon the stones; but when it has brought down the pillars and leveled them with the ground, nothing more is wanted to consume all the rest in the flames.

For when the props and supports of the upper parts fall down, those parts also themselves will speedily enough follow them. Thus is it also at this moment with the Church: the fire has laid hold on every part. We seek the honors that come from man, we burn for glory, and we hearken not to Job when he says,

If like Adam (or after the manner of men) I covered my transgressions

By hiding mine iniquity in my bosom,

Because I feared the great multitude.

Behold ye a virtuous spirit? I was not ashamed, he says, to own before the whole multitude my involuntary sins: And if he was not ashamed to confess, much more were it our duty to do so. For says the prophet, Set thou forth your cause, that you may be justified. Isaiah 43:26 Great is the violence of this evil, everything is overturned by it and annihilated. We have forsaken the Lord, and have become slaves of

honor. We are no longer able to rebuke those who are under our rule, because we ourselves also are possessed with the same fever as they. We who are appointed by God to heal others, need the physician ourselves. What further hope of recovery is there left, when even the very physicians themselves need the healing hand of others?

I have not said these things without an object, nor am I making lamentations to no purpose, but with the view that one and all, with our women and children, having sprinkled ourselves with ashes, and girded ourselves about with sackcloth, may keep a long fast, may beseech God Himself to stretch forth His hand to us, and to stay the peril. For need is there indeed of His hand, that mighty, that marvelous hand. Greater things are required of us than of the Ninevites. Yet three days, said the prophet, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. Jonah 3:4 A fearful message, and burdened with tremendous threat. And how should it be otherwise? To expect that within three days, the city should become their tomb, and that all should perish in one common judgment. For if, when it happens that two children die at the same time in one house, the hardship becomes intolerable, and if to Job this of all things seemed the most intolerable, that the roof fell in upon all his children, and they were thus killed; what must it be to behold not one house, nor two children, but a nation of a hundred and twenty thousand buried beneath the ruins!

You know how terrible a disaster is this, for lately has this very warning happened to us, not that any prophet uttered a voice, for we are not worthy to hear such a voice, but the warning crying aloud from on high more distinctly than any trumpet. However, as I was saying, Yet three days, said the prophet, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. A terrible warning indeed, but now we have nothing even like that; no, there are no longer three days, nor is there a Nineveh to be overthrown, but many days are already past since the Church throughout all the world has been overthrown, and leveled with the ground, and all alike are overwhelmed in the evil; nay more, of those that are in high places the stress is so much the greater. Wonder not therefore if I should exhort you to do greater things than the Ninevites; and why? Nay more, I do not now proclaim a fast only, but I suggest to you the remedy which raised up that city also when falling. And what was that? God saw their works, says the prophet, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil which He said He would do unto them. Jonah 3:10 This let us do, both we and you. Let us renounce the passion for riches, the lust for glory, beseeching God to stretch forth His hand, and to raise up our fallen members. And well may we, for our fear is not for the same objects as theirs; for then indeed it was only stones and timbers that were to fall, and bodies that were to perish; but now it is none of these; no, but souls are about to be delivered over to hell fire. Let us implore, let us confess unto Him, let us give thanks unto Him for what is past, let us entreat Him for what is to come, that we may be counted worthy to be delivered from this fierce and most terrible monster, and to lift up our thanksgivings to the loving God and Father with whom, to the Son, together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, might, and honor, now, henceforth, and for ever and ever. Amen.

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