

Homily 17 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's Homily 17 on Ephesians emphasizes the importance of kindness, forgiveness, and imitating God's love through Christ's sacrifice.

Scripture: Psalm 2:11, Matthew 5:45, Matthew 6:14, 1 Corinthians 13:11, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Ephesians 4:32 - 5:1

Topics: "Imitating God", "Sacrificial Love"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of imitating God by being kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving towards one another, just as God forgave us through Christ's sacrifice. He emphasizes the need to walk in love, following Christ's example of sacrificial love. Chrysostom warns against engaging in jesting, filthiness, and foolish talking, urging believers to instead give thanks and avoid behaviors unbecoming of saints. He highlights the significance of imitating God as beloved children and living a life of love and forgiveness, reflecting the sacrificial love of Christ.

Transcript

Ephesians 4:32 and 5:1, 2

And be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you. Be therefore imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell.

The events which are past have greater force than those which are yet to come, and appear to be both more wonderful and more convincing. And hence accordingly Paul founds his exhortation upon the things which have already been done for us, inasmuch as they, on Christ's account, have a greater force. For to say, Forgive, and you shall be forgiven Matthew 6:14, and if you forgive not, you shall in nowise be forgiven Matthew 6:15 -- this addressed to men of understanding, and men who believe in the things to come, is of great weight; but Paul appeals to the conscience not by these arguments only, but also by things already done for us. In the former way we may escape punishment, whereas in this latter we may have our share of some positive good. Thou imitatest Christ. This alone is enough to recommend virtue, that it is to imitate God. This is a higher principle than the other, for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. Matthew 5:45 Because he does not merely say that we are imitating God, but that we do so in those things wherein we receive ourselves such benefits. He would have us cherish the tender heart of fathers towards each other. For by heart, here, is meant lovingkindness and compassion. For inasmuch as it cannot be that, being men, we shall avoid either

giving pain or suffering it, he does the next thing, he devises a remedy -- that we should forgive one another. And yet there is no comparison. For if you indeed should at this moment forgive any one, he will forgive you again in return; whereas to God you have neither given nor forgiven anything. And thou indeed art forgiving a fellow-servant; whereas God is forgiving a servant, and an enemy, and one that hates Him.

Even as God, says he, also in Christ forgave you.

And this, moreover, contains a high allusion. Not simply, he would say, has He forgiven us, and at no risk or cost, but at the sacrifice of His Son; for that He might forgive you, He sacrificed the Son; whereas thou, oftentimes, even when you see pardon to be both without risk and without cost, yet dost not grant it.

Be therefore imitators of God as beloved children; and walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us an offering and sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell.

That you may not then think it an act of necessity, hear how He says, that He gave Himself up. As your Master loved you, love thou your friend. Nay, but neither will you be able so to love; yet still do so as far as you are able. Oh, what can be more blessed than a sound like this! Tell me of royalty or whatever else you will, there is no comparison. Forgive another, and you are imitating God, you are made like God. It is more our duty to forgive trespasses than debts of money; for if you forgive debts, you have not imitated God; whereas if you shall forgive trespasses, you are imitating God. And yet how shall you be able to say, I am poor, and am not able to forgive it, that is, a debt, when you forgive not that which you are able to forgive, that is, a trespass? And surely thou dost not deem that in this case there is any loss. Yea, is it not rather wealth, is it not abundance, is it not a plentiful store?

And behold yet another and a nobler incitement: -- as beloved children, says he. You have yet another cogent reason to imitate Him, not only in that you have received such good at His hands, but also in that you are called His children. And since not all children imitate their fathers, but those which are beloved, therefore he says, as beloved children.

Ver. 2. Walk in love.

Behold, here, the groundwork of all! So then where this is, there is no wrath, no anger, no clamor, no railing, but all are done away. Accordingly he puts the chief point last. Whence were you made a child? Because you were forgiven. On the same ground on which you have had so vast a privilege vouch-safed you, on that selfsame ground forgive your neighbor. Tell me, I say, if you were in prison, and had ten thousand misdeeds to answer for, and some one were to bring you into the palace; or rather to pass over this argument, suppose thou were in a fever and in the agonies of death, and some one were to benefit you by some medicine, would you not value him more than all, yea and the very name of the medicine? For if we thus regard occasions and places by which we are benefited, even as our own souls, much more shall we the things themselves. Be a lover then of love; for by this are you saved, by this have you been made a son. And if you shall have it in your power to save another, will you not use the same remedy, and give the advice to all, Forgive, that you may be forgiven? Thus to incite one another, were the part of grateful, of generous, and noble spirits.

Even as Christ also, he adds, loved you.

You are only sparing friends, He enemies. So then far greater is that boon which comes from our Master. For how in our case is the even as preserved. Surely it is clear that it will be, by our doing good to our

enemies.

And gave Himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell.

Do you see that to suffer for one's enemies is a sweet-smelling savor, and an acceptable sacrifice? And if you shall die, then will you be indeed a sacrifice. This it is to imitate God.

Ver. 3. But fornication, and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as becomes saints.

He has spoken of the bitter passion, of wrath; he now comes to the lesser evil: for that lust is the lesser evil, hear how Moses also in the law says, first, You shall do no murder Exodus 20:13, which is the work of wrath, and then, You shall not commit adultery Exodus 20:14, which is of lust. For as bitterness, and clamor, and all malice, and railing, and the like, are the works of the passionate man, so likewise are fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, those of the lustful; since avarice and sensuality spring from the same passion. But just as in the former case he took away clamor as being the vehicle of anger, so now does he filthy talking and jesting as being the vehicle of lust; for he proceeds,

Ver. 4. Nor filthiness, nor foolish talking, or jesting, which are not befitting; but rather giving of thanks.

Have no witticisms, no obscenities, either in word or in deed, and you will quench the flame -- let them not even be named, says he, among you, that is, let them not anywhere even make their appearance. This he says also in writing to the Corinthians. It is actually reported that there is fornication among you 1 Corinthians 5:1; as much as to say, Be all pure. For words are the way to acts. Then, that he may not appear a forbidding kind of person and austere, and a destroyer of playfulness, he goes on to add the reason, by saying, which are not befitting, which have nothing to do with us -- but rather giving of thanks. What good is there in uttering a witticism? thou only raisest a laugh. Tell me, will the shoemaker ever busy himself about anything which does not belong to or befit his trade? Or will he purchase any tool of that kind? No, never. Because the things we do not need, are nothing to us.

Moral. Let there not be one idle word; for from idle words we fall also into foul words. The present is no season of loose merriment, but of mourning, of tribulation, and lamentation: and do you play the jester? What wrestler on entering the ring neglects the struggle with his adversary, and utters witticisms? The devil stands hard at hand, he is going about roaring 1 Peter 5:8 to catch you, he is moving everything, and turning everything against your life, and is scheming to force you from your retreat, he is grinding his teeth and bellowing, he is breathing fire against your salvation; and do you sit uttering witticisms, and talking folly, and uttering things which are not befitting.

Full nobly then will you be able to overcome him! We are in sport, beloved. Would you know the life of the saints? Listen to what Paul says. By the space of three years I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears. Acts 20:31 And if so great was the zeal he exerted in behalf of them of Miletus and Ephesus, not making pleasant speeches, but introducing his admonition with tears, what should one say of the rest? But hearken again to what he says to the Corinthians.

Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears. 2 Corinthians 2:4 And again, Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I burn not? 2 Corinthians 11:29 And hearken again to what he says elsewhere, desiring every day, as one might say, to depart out of the world. For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan 2 Corinthians 5:4; and do you laugh and play? It is

war-time, and are you handling the dancers' instruments? Look at the countenances of men in battle, their dark and contracted mien, their brow terrible and full of awe.

Mark the stern eye, the heart eager and beating and throbbing, their spirit collected, and trembling and intensely anxious. All is good order, all is good discipline, all is silence in the camps of those who are arrayed against each other. They speak not, I do not say, an impertinent word, but they utter not a single sound. Now if they who have visible enemies, and who are in nowise injured by words, yet observe so great silence, do you who hast your warfare, and the chief of your warfare in words, do you leave this part naked and exposed?

Or are you ignorant that it is here that we are most beset with snares? Are you amusing and enjoying yourself, and uttering witticisms and raising a laugh, and regarding the matter as a mere nothing? How many perjuries, how many injuries, how many filthy speeches have arisen from witticisms! But no, you will say, pleasantries are not like this. Yet hear how he excludes all kinds of jesting. It is a time now of war and fighting, of watch and guard, of arming and arraying ourselves.

The time of laughter can have no place here; for that is of the world. Hear what Christ says: The world shall rejoice, but you shall be sorrowful. John 16:20 Christ was crucified for your ills, and do you laugh? He was buffeted, and endured so great sufferings because of your calamity, and the tempest that had overtaken you; and do you play the reveler? And how will you not then rather provoke Him?

But since the matter appears to some to be one of indifference, which moreover is difficult to be guarded against, let us discuss this point a little, to show you how vast an evil it is. For indeed this is a work of the devil, to make us disregard things indifferent. First of all then, even if it were indifferent, not even in that case were it right to disregard it, when one knows that the greatest evils are both produced and increased by it, and that it oftentimes terminates in fornication. However, that it is not even indifferent is evident from hence. Let us see then whence it is produced. Or rather, let us see what sort of a person a saint ought to be:-- gentle, meek, sorrowful, mournful, contrite. The man then who deals in jests is no saint. Nay, were he even a Greek, such an one would be scorned. These are things allowed to those only who are on the stage. Where filthiness is, there also is jesting; where unseasonable laughter is, there also is jesting. Harken to what the Prophet says, Serve the Lord in fear, and rejoice with trembling. Psalm 2:11 Jestings renders the soul soft and indolent. It excites the soul unduly, and often it teems with acts of violence, and creates wars. But what more? In fine, have you not come to be among men? Then put away childish things. 1 Corinthians 13:11 Why, you will not allow your own servant in the market place to speak an impertinent word: and do you then, who sayest you are a servant of God, go uttering your witticisms in the public square? It is well if the soul that is sober be not stolen away; but one that is relaxed and dissolute, who cannot carry off? It will be its own murderer, and will stand in no need of the crafts or assaults of the devil.

But, moreover, in order to understand this, look too at the very name. It means the versatile man, the man of all complexions, the unstable, the pliable, the man that can be anything and everything. But far is this from those who are servants to the Rock. Such a character quickly turns and changes; for he must needs mimic both gesture and speech, and laugh and gait, and everything, aye, and such an one is obliged to invent jokes: for he needs this also. But far be this from a Christian, to play the buffoon. Farther, the man who plays the jester must of necessity incur the signal hatred of the objects of his random ridicule, whether they be present, or being absent hear of it.

If the thing is creditable, why is it left to mountebanks? What, do you make yourself a mountebank, and yet art not ashamed? Why is it ye permit not your gentlewomen to do so? Is it not that you set it down as a mark of an immodest, and not of a discreet character? Great are the evils that dwell in a soul given to jesting; great is the ruin and desolation. Its consistency is broken, the building is decayed, fear is banished, reverence is gone. A tongue you have, not that you may ridicule another man, but that you may give thanks unto God. Look at your merriment-makers, as they are called, those buffoons. These are your jesters. Banish from your souls, I entreat you, this graceless accomplishment. It is the business of parasites, of mountebanks, of dancers, of harlots; far be it from a generous, far be it from a highborn soul, aye, far too even from slaves. If there be any one who has lost respect, if there be any vile person, that man is also a jester. To many indeed the thing appears to be even a virtue, and this truly calls for our sorrow. Just as lust little by little drives headlong into fornication, so also does a turn for jesting. It seems to have a grace about it, yet there is nothing more graceless than this. For hear the Scripture which says, Before the thunder goes lightning, and before a shamefaced man shall go favor. Now there is nothing more shameless than the jester; so that his mouth is not full of favor, but of pain. Let us banish this custom from our tables. Yet are there some who teach it even to the poor! O monstrous! They make men in affliction play the jester. Why, where shall not this pest be found next? Already has it been brought into the Church itself. Already has it laid hold of the very Scriptures. Need I say anything to prove the enormity of the evil? I am ashamed indeed, but still nevertheless I will speak; for I am desirous to show to what a length the mischief has advanced, that I may not appear to be trifling, or to be discoursing to you on some trifling subject; that even thus I may be enabled to withdraw you from this delusion. And let no one think that I am fabricating, but I will tell you what I have really heard. A certain person happened to be in company with one of those who pride themselves highly on their knowledge (now I know I shall excite a smile, but still I will say it notwithstanding); and when the platter was set before him, he said, Take and eat, children, lest your belly be angry! And again, others say, Woe unto you, Mammon, and to him that has you not; and many like enormities has jesting introduced; as when they say, Now is there no nativity. And this I say to show the enormity of this base temper; for these are the expressions of a soul destitute of all reverence. And are not these things enough to call down thunderbolts? And one might find many other such things which have been said by these men.

Wherefore, I entreat you, let us banish the custom universally, and speak those things which become us. Let not holy mouths utter the words of dishonorable and base men. For what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity, or what communion has light with darkness? 2 Corinthians 6:14 Happy will it be for us, if, having kept ourselves aloof from all such foul things, we be thus able to attain to the promised blessings; far indeed from dragging such a train after us, and sullyng the purity of our minds by so many. For the man who will play the jester will soon go on to be a railer, and the railer will go on to heap ten thousand other mischiefs on himself. When then we shall have disciplined these two faculties of the soul, anger and desire (vid. Plat. Phædr. cc. 25, 34), and have put them like well-broken horses under the yoke of reason, then let us set over them the mind as charioteer, that we may gain the prize of our high calling Philippians 3:14; which God grant that we may all attain, through Jesus Christ our Lord, with Whom, together with the Holy Ghost, be unto the Father, glory, might, and honor, now, and ever, and throughout all ages. Amen.

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