

Homily 21 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being a member of the body of Christ, using our gifts and ministries with simplicity and diligence, and showing love and hospitality to others.

Topics: "Church Unity", "Christian Love"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of unity and humility among believers, using the analogy of the body to emphasize that all members are interconnected and should not boast or look down on one another. He highlights the need for genuine love, honor, and service towards fellow believers, encouraging a spirit of generosity, hospitality, and cheerfulness in helping those in need. Chrysostom stresses the significance of fervent prayer, patience in tribulation, and rejoicing in hope as ways to maintain a strong faith and love for one another, ultimately reflecting the love and mercy of Christ in our actions.

Transcript

Romans XII. 4, 5

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Again he uses the same ensample as he does to the Corinthians, and that to allay the same passion. For great is the power of the medicine, and the force of this illustration for the correcting of this disease of haughtiness. Why (he means) do you think highly of yourself? Or why again does another utterly despise himself? Are we not all one body, both great and small? When then we are in the total number but one, and members one of another, why do you by your haughtiness separate yourself? Why do you put your brother to shame? For as he is a member of you, so are you also of him. And it is on this score that your claims to honor are so equal. For he has stated two things that might take down their haughty spirit: one that we are members one of another, not the small of the great only, but also the great of the small; and another, that we are all one body. Or rather there are three points, since he shows that the gift was one of grace. Therefore be not high-minded. For it was given you of God; thou did not take it, nor find it even. Hence too, when he touches upon the gifts, he does not say that one received more, and another less, but what? different. For his words are, having then gifts, not less and greater, but, differing. And what if you are not appointed to the same office, still the body is the same. And beginning with gifts, he ends with a good deed (4 manuscripts pl.); and so after mentioning prophecy, and ministry, and the like, he concludes with mercy, diligence, and succor. Since then it was likely that some would be virtuous, yet not have

prophecy, he shows how that this too is a gift, and a much greater one than the other (as he shows in the Epistle to the Corinthians), and so much the greater, as that one has a reward, the other is devoid of a recompense. For the whole is matter of gift and grace. Wherefore he says,

Ver. 6. Having then gifts differing according to the grace of God that is given unto us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.

Since then he had sufficiently comforted them, he wishes also to make them vie with each other, and labor more in earnest, by showing that it is themselves that give the grounds for their receiving more or less. For he says indeed that it is given by God (as when he says, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith; and again, according to the grace given unto us) Romans 12:3, that he may subdue the haughty. But he says also that the beginnings lie with themselves, to rouse the listless. And this he does in the Epistle to the Corinthians also, to produce both these emotions. For when he says, covet earnestly the gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:31, he shows that they were themselves the cause of the differences in what was given. But when he says, Now all these things works one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will 1 Corinthians 12:11, he is proving that those who have received it ought not to be elated, so using every way open to him to allay their disorder. And this he does here also. And again, to rouse those who have fallen drowsy, he says, Whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith. For though it is a grace, yet it is not poured forth at random, but framing its measure according to the recipients, it lets as much flow as it may find the vessel of faith that is brought to be capable of.

Ver. 7. Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering.

Here he names a comprehensive thing. For the Apostleship even is called a ministry, and every spiritual work is a ministry. This is indeed a name of a peculiar office (viz. the diaconate); however, it is used in a general sense. Or he that teaches, on teaching. See with what indifference he places them, the little first and the great afterwards, again giving us the same lesson, not to be puffed up or elated.

Ver. 8. Or he that exhorts, on exhortation.

And this is a species of teaching too. For if you have any word of exhortation, it says, speak unto the people. Acts 13:15 Then to show that it is no great good to follow after virtue unless this is done with the proper rule, he proceeds, He that gives (ἵνα ἑκάστης ἑαυτὴν ἀντιλαμβάνεται τὴν χάριν αὐτοῦ, imparts), let him do it with simplicity. For it is not enough to give, but we must do it with munificence also, for this constantly answers to the name of simplicity. Since even the virgins had oil, still, since they had not enough, they were cast out from everything.

He that defends (A.V. rules, ἵνα ἑκάστης ἑαυτὴν ἀντιλαμβάνεται τὴν χάριν αὐτοῦ,) with diligence; for it is not enough to do undertake the defense. He that shows mercy, with cheerfulness. For it is not enough to show mercy, but it behooves us to do it with a largeness and an ungrudging spirit, or rather not with an ungrudging, but even with a cheerful and rejoicing one, for not grudging does not amount to rejoicing. And this same point, when he is writing to the Corinthians also, he insisted very strongly upon.

For to rouse them to such largeness he said, He that sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully. 2 Corinthians 9:6 But to correct their temper he added, Not grudgingly or of necessity. 2 Corinthians 9:7 For both the shower of mercy ought to have, both ungrudgingness and pleasure. And why do you bemoan yourself of giving alms? (Aristot. Eth. N. ii. 3 and

iv. 1.) Why do you grieve at showing mercy, and lose the advantage of the good deed?

For if you grieve you do not do mercy, but are cruel and inhuman. For if you grieve, how shall you be able to raise up him that is in sorrow? For it is much if he suspects no ill, even, when you are giving with joyfulness. For since nothing seems to men such a disgrace as to be receiving from others, unless by an exceedingly cheerful look you remove the suspicion, and showest that you are receiving rather than giving, you will even cast down the receiver rather than raise him up.

This is why he says, He that shows mercy, with cheerfulness. For who that is receiving a kingdom, is of sad countenance? Who that is receiving pardon for his sins continues of dejected look? Mind not then the expenditure of the money; but the increase that comes of that expenditure. For if he that sows rejoices though sowing with uncertainty of return, much more should he do so that farms the Heaven. For in this way, even though thou give but little, you will be giving much; even as how much soever you give with a sad countenance, you will have made your much a little.

Thus the widow outweighed many talents by the two mites, for her spirit was large. And how is it possible, it may be said, for one that dwells with poverty in the extreme, and empties forth his all, to do this with a ready mind? Ask the widow, and you will hear the way, and will know that it is not poverty that makes narrow circumstances, but the temper of a man that effects both this and its opposite. For it is possible even in poverty to be munificent (1¼μῖς ἢ ἑξήκοντα ἢ ἑκατὸν ἀνδράσιν, and in riches to be niggardly.

Hence in giving he looks for simplicity, and in showing mercy for cheerfulness, and in patronizing for diligence. For it is not with money only that he wishes us to render every assistance to those in want, but both with words, and deeds, and in person, and in every other way. And after mentioning the chief kind of aiding (ἐν ἡμετέροις, ἢ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις, ἢ ἐν τοῖς πτωχοῖς, ἢ ἐν τοῖς ἁμαρτωλοῖς), that which lies in teaching, namely, and that of exhorting (for this is a more necessary kind, in that it nurtures the soul), he proceeds to that by way of money, and all other means; then to show how these may be practised aright, he brings in the mother of them, love.

Ver. 9. For, Let love be without dissimulation, he says,

If you have this, you will not perceive the loss of your money, the labor of your person, the toil of your words, your trouble, and your ministering, but you will bear all courageously, whether it be with person, or money, or word, or any other thing whatsoever, that you are to assist your neighbor. As then he does not ask for giving only, but that with simplicity, nor aiding, but that with diligence, nor alms, but that with cheerfulness; so even love too he requires not alone, but that without dissimulation. Since this is what love is. And if a man have this, everything else follows. For he that shows mercy does so with cheerfulness (for he is giving to himself): and he that aids, aids with diligence; for it is for himself he is aiding: and he that imparts does this with largeness; for he is bestowing it on himself. Then since there is a love even for ill things, such as is that of the intemperate, that of those who are of one mind for money, and for plunder's sake, and for revels and drinking clubs, he clears it of all these, by saying, Abhor (ἀποφύγετε τὸν πόλεμον, τὴν φιλίαν, τὴν φιλονεικίαν, τὴν φιλονεικίαν, τὴν φιλονεικίαν, τὴν φιλονεικίαν), that which is evil. And he does not speak of refraining from it, but of hating it, and not merely hating it, but hating it exceedingly. For this word ἀποφύγετε ἵνα μὴ, is often of intensive force with him, as where he speaks of earnest expectation, looking out for, (complete) redemption. For since many who do not evil things still have a desire after them, therefore he says, Abhor. For what he wants is to purify the thought, and that we should have a mighty enmity, hatred and war against vice. For do not fancy, he means, because I said, Love one another, that I mean you to go so far as to cooperate even in bad actions with one another; for the law that I am laying down is just the reverse. Since it would have you an

alien not from the action only, but even from the inclination towards vice; and not merely an alien from this same inclination, but to have an excessive aversion and hatred of it too. And he is not content with only this, but he also brings in the practice of virtue. Cleave to that which is good.

He does not speak of doing only, but of being disposed too. For this the command to cleave to it indicates. So God, when He knit the man to the woman, said, For he shall cleave to his wife. Genesis 2:24 Then he mentions reasons why we ought to love one another.

Ver. 10. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.

You are brethren, he means, and have come of the same pangs. Hence even on this head you ought to love one another. And this Moses said to those who were quarrelling in Egypt, You are brethren, why do ye wrong one to another? Exodus 2:13 When then he is speaking of those without, he says, If it be possible, as much as in you lies, live peaceably with all men. Romans 12:18 But when he is speaking of his own, he says, Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love. For in the other case he requires abstinence from quarrelling, and hatred, and aversion: but here loving too, and not merely loving, but the loving of relatives. For not only must one's love be without dissimulation, but intense also, and warm, and glowing. Because, to what purpose would you love without fraud, and not love with warmth? Whence he says, kindly affectioned one towards another, that is, be friends, and warm ones too. Do not wait to be loved by another, but leap at it yourself, and be the first to begin it. For so will you reap the wages of his love also. Having mentioned the reason then why we ought to love one another, he tells us also the way in which the affection may grow unchangeable. Whence he proceeds, In honor preferring one another. For this is the way that affection is produced, and also when produced abides. And there is nothing which makes friends so much, as the earnest endeavor to overcome one's neighbor in honoring him. For what he had mentioned before comes of love, and love of honor, as honor does too of love. Then that we may not honor only, he looks for something besides, when he says,

Ver. 11. Not backward in zeal.

For this also genders love when with honor we also show a readiness to protect: as there is nothing that makes men beloved so much as honor and forethought. For to love is not enough, but there must be this also: or rather this also comes of loving, as also loving has its warmth from this, and they are confirmative one of another. For there are many that love in mind, yet reach not forth the hand. And this is why he uses every means to build up love. And how are we to become not backward in zeal?

Fervent in spirit. See how in every instance he aims after higher degrees; for he does not say give only, but with largeness; nor rule, but do it with diligence; nor show mercy, but do it with cheerfulness; nor honor, but prefer one another; nor love, but do it without dissimulation; nor refrain from evil things, but hate them; nor hold to what is good, but cleave to it; nor love, but to do it with brotherly affection; nor be zealous, but be so without backwardness; nor have the Spirit, but have it fervent, that is, that you may be warm and awakened. For if you have those things aforesaid, you will draw the Spirit to you. And if This abide with you, It will likewise make you good for those purposes, and all things will be easy from the Spirit and the love, while you are made to glow from both sides. Do you not see the bulls (Hannibal. ap. Liv. xxii. 16) that carry a flame upon their back, how nobody is able to withstand them? So thou also will be more than the devil can sustain, if you take both these flames. Serving the Lord. For it is possible to serve God in all these ways; in that whatever you do to your brother passes on to your Master, and as having been Himself benefited, He will reckon your reward accordingly. See to what height he has raised the spirit of

the man that works these things! Then to show how the flame of the Spirit might be kindled, he says,

Ver. 12. Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer.

For all these things are fuel for that fire. For when he had required the expenditure of money and the labor of the person, and ruling, and zeal, and teaching, and other laborious occupations, he again supplies the wrestler with love, with the Spirit, through hope. For there is nothing which makes the soul so courageous and venturesome for anything as a good hope. Then even before the good things hoped for, he gives another reward again. For since hope is of things to come, he says, patient in tribulation. And before the things to come, in this life present you will gain a great good see on Romans 5:4, p. 397 from tribulation, that of becoming hardy and tried. And after this he affords them another help, when he says, continuing instant in prayer. When therefore love makes things easy, and the Spirit assists, and hope lightens, and tribulation makes you tried and apt for bearing everything nobly, and you have along with these another very great weapon, to wit, prayer and the aidances that come of prayer, what further grievousness can there be in what he is enjoining? Surely none. You see how in every way he gives the wrestler firm footing and shows that the injunctions are perfectly easy. Consider again how he vindicates almsgiving, or rather not almsgiving absolutely, but that to the saints. For above when he says, he that shows mercy with cheerfulness, he makes us open-handed to everybody. Here, however, it is in behalf of the faithful that he is speaking. And so he proceeds to say,

Ver. 13. Sharing with the necessity (ἰσχυροῦς ἰσχυροῦς, al. ἰσχυροῦς ἰσχυροῦς, memories) of the saints.

He does not say, Bestow upon, but share with the necessity of the saints, to show that they receive more than they give, that it is a matter of merchandise, because it is a community. Do you bring in money? They bring you in boldness toward God. Given to (Gr. pursuing) hospitality. He does not say doing it, but given to it, so to instruct us not to wait for those that shall ask it, and see when they will come to us, but to run to them, and be given to finding them.

Thus did Lot, thus Abraham. For he spent the whole day upon it, waiting for this goodly prey, and when he saw it, leaped upon it, and ran to meet them, and worshipped upon the ground, and said, My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, pass not away from Your servant. Genesis 18:3 Not as we do, if we happen to see a stranger or a poor man, knitting our brows, and not deigning even to speak to them. And if after thousands of entreaties we are softened, and bid the servant give them a trifle, we think we have quite done our duty.

But he did not so, but assumed the fashion of a suppliant and a servant, though he did not know who he was going to take under his roof. But we, who have clear information that it is Christ Whom we take in, do not grow gentle even for this. But he both beseeches, and entreats, and falls on his knees to them, yet we insult those that come to us. And he indeed did all by himself and his wife, whereas we do it not even by our attendants. But if you have a mind to see the table that he set before them, there too you will see great bounteousness, but the bounteousness came not from excess of wealth, but of the riches of a ready will.

Yet how many rich persons were there not then? Still none did anything of the kind. How many widows were there in Israel? Yet none showed hospitality to Elijah. How many wealthy persons again were there not in Elisha's day? But the Shunamite alone gathered in the fruits of hospitality; as did Abraham also, whom beside his largeness and ready mind it is just especially to admire, on this ground, that when he had no knowledge who they were that had come, yet he so acted. Do not thou then be curious either: since for Christ thou dost receive him.

And if you are always so scrupulous, many a time will you pass by a man of esteem, and lose your reward from him. And yet he that receives one that is not of esteem, has no fault found with him, but is even rewarded. For he that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward. Matthew 10:41 But he who out of this ill-timed scrupulousness passes one that should be admired, shall even suffer punishment. Do not then busy yourself with men's lives and doings.

For this is the very extreme of niggardliness, for one loaf to be exact about a man's entire life. For if this person be a murderer, if a robber, or what not, does he therefore seem to you not to deserve a loaf and a few pence? And yet your Master causes even the sun to rise upon him! And do you judge him unworthy of food even for a day? I will put another case to you besides. Now even if you were positively certain that he were laden with countless iniquities, not even then would you have an excuse for depriving him of this day's sustenance.

For you are the servant of Him Who said, You know not what spirit you are of. Luke 9:55 You are servant to Him Who healed those that stoned Him, or rather Who was crucified for them. And do not tell me that he killed another, for even if he were going to kill you yourself, even then you should not neglect him when starving. For you are a disciple of Him Who desired the salvation even of them that crucified Him Who said upon the Cross itself, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Luke 23:34 You are the servant of Him Who healed him that smote Him, Who upon the Cross itself crowned the man who had scorned Him. And what can equal this? For both the robbers at first scorned Him. Still to one of these He opened Paradise. And He bewails those who were upon the point of killing Him, and is troubled and confounded at seeing the traitor, not because He was going to be crucified, but because he was lost. He was troubled then as having foreknowledge of the hanging, and the punishment after the hanging.

And though He knelt his wickedness, He bore with him to the last hour, and thrust not away the traitor, but even kissed him. Your Master kisses, and with His lips receives him who was on the very point of shedding His precious Blood. And do you count the poor not worthy even of a loaf, and reverencest not the Law which Christ laid down? Now by this He shows that we ought not to turn aside, not only from the poor, but not even from those that would lead us away to death. Do not tell me then, that so and so has done me grievous mischief, but just consider what Christ did near the Cross itself, wishing to amend by His kiss the traitor by whom He was on the point of being betrayed.

And see with how much power to shame him. For He says, Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss? Luke 23:48 Who is there He would not have softened? Who is there that this address would not have made yielding? What beast? What adamant? Yet not that wretched man. Do not then say, that such an one murdered such an one, and that is why I turn aside from him. For even if he were upon the point of thrusting a sword down into you, and to plunge his hand into your neck itself, kiss this very right hand! since even Christ kissed that mouth which wrought His death!

And therefore do not thou either hate, but bewail and pity him that plots against you. For such an one deserves pity at our hands, and tears. For we are the servants of Him Who kissed even the traitor (I will not leave off dwelling over that continually), and spoke words unto him more gentle than the kiss. For He did not even say, O thou foul and villanous traitor, is this the sort of recompense you return us for so great a benefit? But in what words? Judas; using his own name, which is more like a person bemoaning, and recalling him, than one angry at him.

And he does not say, your Teacher, your Master, and Benefactor, but, the Son of Man. For though He were neither Teacher nor Master, yet is it with One Who is so gently, so unfeignedly affected towards you, as even to kiss you at the time of betrayal, and that when a kiss too was the signal for the betrayal; is it with Him that you play the traitor's part? Blessed are You, O Lord! What lowliness of mind, what forbearance have You given us ensamples of! And to him He so behaved.

But to those who came with staves and swords to Him, was it not so too? What can be more gentle than the words spoken to them? For when He had power to demolish them all in an instant, He did nothing of the kind, but as expostulating (ἀποτίμῳ, ἀποτίμῳ, ἀποτίμῳ), addressed them in the words, Why, are you come out as against a thief with swords and staves? Matthew 26:55 And having cast them down backwards John 18:6, as they continued insensible, He of His own accord gave Himself up next, and forbore while He saw them putting manacles upon His holy hands, while He had the power at once to confound all things, and overthrow them.

But do you even after this deal fiercely with the poor? And even were he guilty of ten thousand sins, want and famine were enough to soften down a soul ever so blunted. But you stand brutalized, and imitating the rage of lions. Yet they never taste of dead bodies. But you, while you see him a very corpse (İ,İµİ,İ±İİİİİµİ...İ¼İ½İĈİ½ lit. salter, or, a mummy) for distresses, yet leapest upon him now that he is down, and tearest his body by your insults, and gatherest storm after storm, and makest him as he is fleeing to the haven for refuge to split upon a rock, and bringest a shipwreck about more distressing than those in the sea.

And how will you say to God, Have mercy upon me, and ask of Him remission of sins, when you are insolent to one who has done no sin, and callest him to account for this hunger and great necessity, and throwest all the brute beasts into the shade by your cruelty. For they indeed by the compulsion of their belly lay hold of the food needful for them. But you, when nothing either thrusts you on or compels you, devourest your brother, bitest, and tearest him, if not with your teeth, yet with words that bite more cuttingly.

How then will you receive the sacred Host (ĕiĭĭĭfĭtĭĭĭĭĭĭĭ), when you have empurpled your tongue in human gore? How give the kiss of peace, with mouth gorged with war? Nay, how enjoy every common nourishment, when you are gathering so much venom? Thou dost not relieve the poverty, why make it even more grinding? thou dost not lift up him that is fallen, why throw him down also? thou dost not remove despondency, why even increase it? You give no money, why use insulting words besides?

Have you not heard what punishment they suffer that feed not the poor? To what vengeance they are condemned? For He says, Depart to the fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Matthew 25:41 If then they that feed not are so condemned, what punishment are they to suffer, who besides not feeding, even insult? What punishment shall they undergo? What hell? That we kindle not so great evils against ourselves, whiles we have it in our power, let us correct this evil complaint also, and put a bridle on the tongue.

And let us be so far from insulting, as even to invite them, both by words and actions, that by laying up much mercy for ourselves, we may obtain the blessings promised us. Which God grant that we may all attain unto by the grace and love towards man, etc.

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