

Homily 3 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

The Apostle Paul prays for the Ephesians to receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation, that they may know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance, and the exceeding greatness of His power.

Scripture: Psalm 128:3, 1 Corinthians 1:25, 1 Corinthians 11:26, Ephesians 1:15-23, Colossians 3:1

Topics: "Christology", "Eucharist"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of understanding the blessings and power available to believers through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He emphasizes the need for spiritual wisdom and revelation to grasp the hope of God's calling and the riches of His glory. Chrysostom highlights the exalted position of Christ, seated at the right hand of God, far above all rule and authority, emphasizing the significance of Christ as the Head of the Church. He urges believers to approach the Eucharist with purity and reverence, reminding them of the great honor and responsibility of partaking in the body and blood of Christ.

Transcript

Chapter I. Verses 15-20

For this cause I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus, which is among you, and which you show toward all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: having the eyes of your heart enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead.

Never was anything equal to the yearnings of the Apostle, never anything like the sympathy and the affectionateness of the blessed Paul, who made his every prayer in behalf of whole cities and peoples, and writes the same to all, I thank my God for you, making mention of you in my prayers. Think how many he had in his mind, whom it were a labor so much as to remember; how many he made mention of in his prayers, giving thanks to God for them all as though he himself had received the greatest blessing.

Wherefore, he says, i.e., because of what is to come, because of the good things that are laid up in store for them who rightly believe and live. And it is meet then to give thanks to God both for all the things which

mankind have received at His hands, both heretofore and hereafter; and meet to give Him thanks also for the faith of them that believe.

Having heard, says he, of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you, and which you show toward all the saints.

He on all occasions knits together and combines faith and love, a glorious pair; nor does he mention the saints of that country only, but all.

I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.

What is your prayer, and what your entreaty? It is

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Two things he requires them to understand, as it is their duty to understand them; to what blessings they are called, and how they have been released from their former state. He says, however, himself, that these points are three. How then are they three? In order that we may understand touching the things to come; for from the good things laid up for us, we shall know His ineffable and surpassing riches, and from understanding who we were, and how we believed, we shall know His power and sovereignty, in turning again to Himself those who had been so long time estranged from Him, For the weakness of God is stronger than men. 1 Corinthians 1:25 Inasmuch as it is by the self-same power by which He raised Christ from the dead, that He has also drawn us to Himself. Nor is that power limited to the resurrection, but far exceeds it.

Ver. 21, 22. And made Him to sit at His right hand, in the Heavenly places, far above all rule and authority, and power and dominion, and every name that is named: and He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all.

Vast indeed are the mysteries and secrets of which He has made us partakers. And these it is not possible for us to understand otherwise than by being partakers of the Holy Ghost, and by receiving abundant grace. And it is for this reason that Paul prays. The Father of glory, that is, He that has given us vast blessings, for he constantly addresses Him according to the subject he is upon, as, for instance, when he says, The Father of mercies and God of all comfort. 2 Corinthians 1:3 And, again, the Prophet says, The Lord is my strength and my might. Psalm 18:1

The Father of glory.

He has no name by which he may represent these things, and on all occasions calls them glory, which is in fact, with us, the name and appellation of every kind of magnificence. Mark, he says, the Father of glory; cf. Acts 7:2 but of Christ the God. What then? Is the Son inferior to the glory? No, there is no one, not even a maniac, would say so.

May give unto you,

That is, may raise and wing your understanding, for it is not possible otherwise to understand these things. For the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him. 1 Corinthians 2:14 So then, there is need of spiritual wisdom, that we may perceive things spiritual, that we may see things hidden. That Spirit reveals all things. He is going to set forth the mysteries of God. Now the

knowledge of the mysteries of God, the Spirit alone comprehends, who also searches the deep things of Him. It is not said, that Angel, or Archangel, or any other created power, may give, that is, confer upon you a spiritual gift. And if this be of revelation, then is the discovery of arguments consequently vain. For he that has learned God, and knows God, shall no longer dispute concerning any thing. He will not say, This is impossible, and That is possible, and How did the other thing come to pass? If we learn God, as we ought to know Him; if we learn God from Him from whom we ought to learn Him, that is from the Spirit Himself; then shall we no longer dispute concerning any thing. And hence it is that he says,

Having the eyes of your heart enlightened in the knowledge of Him.

He that has learned what God is, will have no misgiving about His promises, and disbelief about what has been already brought to pass. He prays, then, that there may be given them a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Yet still he also establishes it, as far as he can himself, by arguments, and from already existing facts. For, whereas he was about to mention some things which had already come to pass, and others which had not as yet happened; he makes those which have been brought to pass, a pledge of those which have not: in some such way, I mean, as this,

That you may know, says he, what is the hope of His calling.

It is as yet, he means, hidden, but not so to the faithful.

And, again, what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

This too is as yet hidden.

But what is clear? That through His power we have believed that He has raised Christ. For to persuade souls, is a thing far more miraculous than to raise a dead body. I will endeavor to make this clear. Hearken then. Christ said to the dead, Lazarus, come forth, John 11:43 and straightway he obeyed. Peter said, Tabitha, arise, Acts 9:40 and she did not refuse. He Himself shall speak the word at the last day, and all shall rise, and that so quickly, that they which are yet alive, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep, 1 Thessalonians 4:15 and all shall come to pass, all run together in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. 1 Corinthians 15:52 But in the matter of believing, it is not thus, but how is it? Hearken then to Him again, how He says, How often would I have gathered your children together, and you would not. Matthew 23:37 You perceive that this last is the more difficult. Accordingly, it is upon this that he builds up the whole argument; because by human calculations it is far more difficult to influence the choice, than to work upon nature. And the reason is this, it is because He would thus have us become good of our own will. Thus with good reason does he say,

The exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe.

Yes, when Prophets had availed nothing, nor Angels, nor Archangels, when the whole creation, both visible and invisible, had failed, (the visible lying before us, and without any power to guide us, and much also which is invisible,) then He ordered His own coming, to show us that it was a matter which required Divine power.

The riches of the glory,

That is, the unutterable glory; for what language shall be adequate to express that glory of which the saints shall then be partakers? None. But verily there is need of grace in order that the understanding may

perceive it, and admit even so much as at least one little ray. Some things indeed they knew even before; now he was desirous that they should learn more, and know it more clearly. Do you see how great things He has wrought? He has raised up Christ. Is this a small thing? But look again. He has set Him at His right hand. And shall any language then be able to represent this? Him that is of the earth, more mute than the fishes, and made the sport of devils, He has in a moment raised up on high. Truly this is indeed the exceeding greatness of His power. And behold, whither He has raised Him.

In the heavenly places;

He has made Him far above all created nature, far above all rule and authority.

Far above all rule, he says.

Need then indeed is there of the Spirit, of an understanding wise in the knowledge of Him. Need then is there indeed of revelation. Reflect, how vast is the distance between the nature of man and of God. Yet from this vile estate has He exalted Him to that high dignity. Nor does He mount by degrees, first one step, then another, then a third. Amazing! He does not simply say, above, but, far above; for God is above those powers which are above. And there then has He raised Him, Him that is one of us, brought Him from the lowest point to the supremest sovereignty, to that beyond which there is no other honor. Above all principality, he says, not, i.e., over one and not over another, but over all,

Rule and authority and power, and dominion, and every name that is named.

Whatever there be in Heaven, He has become above all. And this is said of Him that was raised from the dead which is worthy of our admiration; for of God the Word, it cannot possibly be, because what insects are in comparison of man, this the whole creation is in comparison of God. If all mankind are to be counted as spittle and were counted as the turn of a balance, consider the invisible powers as insects. But of Him that was one of us, this is great and surprising indeed. For He raised Him up from the very lowest parts of the earth. If all the nations are as a drop, how small a portion then of that drop is a single man! Yet Him has He made higher than all things, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. Therefore powers there are whose names are to us unintelligible, and unknown.

And He put all things in subjection under His feet.

Not simply so set Him above them as to be honored above them, nor by way of comparison with them, but so that He should sit over them as His slaves. Amazing! Awful indeed are these things; every created power has been made the slave of man by reason of God the Word dwelling in Him. For it is possible for a man to be above others, without having others in subjection, but only as preferred before them. But here it is not so. No, He put all things in subjection under His feet. And not simply put them in subjection, but in the most abject subjection, that below which there can be none. Therefore he adds, under His feet.

And gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church.

Amazing again, whither has He raised the Church? As though he were lifting it up by some engine, he has raised it up to a vast height, and set it on yonder throne; for where the Head is, there is the body also. There is no interval to separate between the Head and the body; for were there a separation, then were it no longer a body, then were it no longer a head. Over all things, he says. What is meant by over all things? He has suffered neither Angel nor Archangel nor any other being to be above Him. But not only in this way has He honored us, in exalting that which is of ourselves, but also in that He has prepared the

whole race in common to follow Him, to cling to Him, to accompany His train.

Which is His body.

In order then that when you hear of the Head you may not conceive the notion of supremacy only, but also of consolidation, and that you may behold Him not as supreme Ruler only, but as Head of a body.

The fullness of Him that fills all in all he says.

As though this were not sufficient to show the close connection and relationship, what does he add? The fullness of Christ is the Church. And rightly, for the complement of the head is the body, and the complement of the body is the head. Mark what great arrangement Paul observes, how he spares not a single word, that he may represent the glory of God. The, complement, he says, i.e., the head is, as it were, filled up by the body, because the body is composed and made up of all its several parts, and he introduces Him as having need of each single one and not only of all in common and together; for unless we be many, and one be the hand, and another the foot, and another some other member, the whole body is not filled up. It is by all then that His body is filled up. Then is the head filled up, then is the body rendered perfect, when we are all knit together and united. Perceivest thou then the riches of the glory of His inheritance? The exceeding greatness of His power towards them that believe? The hope of your calling?

Moral. Let us reverence our Head, let us reflect of what a Head we are the body -- a Head, to whom all things are put in subjection. According to this representation we ought to be better, yea, than the very angels, and greater than the Archangels, in that we have been honored above them all. God took not hold of Angels, as he says in writing to the Hebrews, but He took hold of the seed of Abraham. Hebrews 2:16 He took hold of neither principality nor power, nor dominion, nor any other authority, but He took up our nature, and made it to sit on His right hand. And why do I say, has made it sit? He has made it His garment, and not only so, but has put all things in subjection under His feet. How many sorts of death do you suppose? How many souls? Ten thousand? Yea, and ten thousand times told, but nothing equal to it will you mention. Two things He has done, the greatest things. He has both Himself descended to the lowest depth of humiliation, and has raised up man to the height of exaltation. He saved him by His blood. He spoke of the former first, how that He so greatly humbled Himself. He speaks now of what is stronger than that -- a great thing, the crown of all. Surely, even had we been counted worthy of nothing, it were enough. Or, had we been counted worthy even of this honor, it were enough, without the slaying of the Son. But where there are the two, what power of language must it not transcend and surpass? The very resurrection is not great, when I reflect on these things. It is of Him that he says, The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, not of God the Word.

Let us feel awed at the closeness of our relation, let us dread lest any one should be cut off from this body, lest any one should fall from it, lest any one should appear unworthy of it. If any one were to place a diadem about our head, a crown of gold, should we not do every thing that we might seem worthy of the lifeless jewels? But now it is not a diadem that is about our head, but, what is far greater, Christ is made our very Head, and yet we pay no regard to it. Yet Angels reverence that Head, and Archangels, and all those powers above. And shall we, which are His body, be awed neither on the one account nor the other? And what then shall be our hope of salvation? Conceive to yourself the royal throne, conceive the excess of the honor. This, at least if we chose, might more avail to startle us, yea, even than hell itself. For, even though hell were not, that we having been honored with such an honor, should be found base

and unworthy of it, what punishment, what vengeance must not this carry with it? Think near whom your Head is seated, (this single consideration is amply sufficient for any purpose whatever,) on whose right hand He is placed, far above all principality, and power, and might. Yet is the body of this Head trampled on by the very devils. Nay, God forbid it should be thus; for were it thus, such a body could be His body no longer. Your own head the more respectable of your servants reverence, and do you subject your body to be the sport of them that insult it? How sore punishment then shall you not deserve? If a man should bind the feet of the emperor with bonds and fetters, will he not be liable to the extremity of punishment? Do you expose the whole body to fierce monsters, and not shudder?

However, since our discourse is concerning the Lord's body, come, and let us turn our thoughts to it, even that which was crucified, which was nailed, which is sacrificed. If you are the body of Christ, bear the Cross, for He bore it: bear spitting, bear buffetings, bear nails. Such was that Body; that Body did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. 1 Peter 2:22 His hands did every thing for the benefit of them that needed, His mouth uttered not a word of those things which are not convenient. He heard them say, You have a devil, and He answered nothing.

Further, our discourse is concerning this Body, and as many of us as partake of that Body and taste of that Blood, are partaking of that which is in no wise different from that Body, nor separate. Consider that we taste of that Body that sits above, that is adored by Angels, that is next to the Power that is incorruptible. Alas! How many ways to salvation are open to us! He has made us His own body, He has imparted to us His own body, and yet not one of these things turns us away from what is evil. Oh the darkness, the depth of the abyss, the apathy! Set your mind, says he, on the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Colossians 3:1 And after all this, some set their affections upon money, or licentiousness, others are carried captive by their passions!

Do you not see, that even in our own body, when any part is superfluous and useless, it is cut off, is cut away? It is of no use that it has belonged to the body, when it is mutilated, when it is mortified, when it is decayed, when it is detrimental to the rest. Let us not then be too confident, because we have been once made members of this body. If this body of ours, though but a natural body, nevertheless suffers amputation, what dreadful evil shall it not undergo, if the moral principle should fail? When the body partakes not of this natural food, when the pores are stopped up, then it mortifies; when the ducts are closed, then it is palsied. So is it with us also, when we stop our ears, our soul becomes palsied; when we partake not of the spiritual food, when, instead of corrupt bodily humors, evil dispositions impair us, all these things engender disease, dangerous disease, disease that wastes. And then there will be need of that fire, there will be need of that cutting asunder. For Christ cannot endure that we should enter into the bride-chamber with such a body as this. If He led away, and cast out the man that was clothed in filthy garments, what will He not do unto the man who attaches filth to the body; how will He not dispose of him?

I observe many partaking of Christ's Body lightly and just as it happens, and rather from custom and form, than consideration and understanding. When, says a man, the holy season of Lent sets in, whatever a man may be, he partakes of the mysteries, or, when the day of the Lord's Epiphany comes. And yet it is not the Epiphany, nor is it Lent, that makes a fit time for approaching, but it is sincerity and purity of soul. With this, approach at all times; without it, never. For as often, 1 Corinthians 11:26 says he, as you do this, you proclaim the Lord's death, i.e., you make a remembrance of the salvation that has been wrought for you, and of the benefits which I have bestowed.

Consider those who partook of the sacrifices under the old Covenant, how great abstinence did they practise? How did they not conduct themselves? What did they not perform? They were always purifying themselves. And do you, when you draw near to a sacrifice, at which the very Angels tremble, do you measure the matter by the revolutions of seasons? And how shall you present yourself before the judgment-seat of Christ, thou who presumest upon His body with polluted hands and lips?

You would not presume to kiss a king with an unclean mouth, and the King of heaven do you kiss with an unclean soul? It is an outrage. Tell me, would you choose to come to the Sacrifice with unwashed hands? No, I suppose, not. But you would rather choose not to come at all, than come with soiled hands. And then, thus scrupulous as you are in this little matter, do you come with soiled soul, and thus dare to touch it? And yet the hands hold it but for a time, whereas into the soul it is dissolved entirely.

What, do you not see the holy vessels so thoroughly cleansed all over, so resplendent? Our souls ought to be purer than they, more holy, more brilliant. And why so? Because those vessels are made so for our sakes. They partake not of Him that is in them, they perceive Him not. But we do --yes, verily. Now then, you would not choose to make use of a soiled vessel, and do you approach with a soiled soul? Observe the vast inconsistency of the thing. At the other times you come not, no, not though often you are clean; but at Easter, however flagrant an act you may have committed, you come.

Oh! The force of custom and of prejudice! In vain is the daily Sacrifice, in vain do we stand before the Altar; there is no one to partake. These things I am saying, not to induce you to partake any how, but that you should render yourselves worthy to partake. Are you not worthy of the Sacrifice, nor of the participation? If so, then neither are you of the prayer. You hear the herald, standing, and saying, As many as are in penitence, all pray. As many as do not partake, are in penitence.

If you are one of those that are in penitence, you ought not to partake; for he that partakes not, is one of those that are in penitence. Why then does he say, Depart, you that are not qualified to pray, while you have the effrontery to stand still? But no, you are not of that number, you are of the number of those who are qualified to partake, and yet art indifferent about it, and regardest the matter as nothing.

Look, I entreat: a royal table is set before you, Angels minister at that table, the King Himself is there, and do you stand gaping? Are your garments defiled, and yet do you make no account of it?-- or are they clean? Then fall down and partake. Every day He comes in to see the guests, and converses with them all. Yes, at this moment is he speaking to your conscience; Friends, how are you standing here, not having on a wedding garment? He said not, Why did you sit down? No, before he sat down, He declared him to be unworthy, so much as to come in. He says not, Why did you sit down to eat, but, Why did you come in? And these are the words that He is at this very moment addressing to one and all of us that stand here with such shameless effrontery. For every one, that partakes not of the mysteries, is standing here in shameless effrontery. It is for this reason, that they which are in sins are first of all put forth; for just as when a master is present at his table, it is not right that those servants who have offended him should be present, but they are sent out of the way: just so also here when the sacrifice is brought forth, and Christ, the Lord's sheep, is sacrificed; when you hear the words, Let us pray together, when you behold the curtains drawn up, then imagine that the Heavens are let down from above, and that the Angels are descending!

As then it is not meet that any one of the uninitiated be present, so neither is it that one of them that are initiated, and yet at the same time defiled. Tell me, suppose any one were invited to a feast, and were to

wash his hands, and sit down, and be all ready at the table, and after all refuse to partake; is he not insulting the man who invited him? Were it not better for such an one never to have come at all? Now it is just in the same way that you have come here. You have sung the Hymn with the rest: you have declared yourself to be of the number of them that are Worthy, by not departing with them that are unworthy. Why stay, and yet not partake of the table? I am unworthy, you will say. Then are you also unworthy of that communion you have had in prayers. For it is not by means of the offerings only, but also by means of those canticles that the Spirit descends all around. Do we not see our own servants, first scouring the table with a sponge, and cleaning the house, and then setting out the entertainment? This is what is done by the prayers, by the cry of the herald. We scour the Church, as it were, with a sponge, that all things may be set out in a pure church, that there may be neither spot nor wrinkle. Ephesians 5:27 Unworthy, indeed, both our eyes of these sights, and unworthy are our ears! And if even a beast, it is said, touch the mountain, it shall be stoned. Exodus 19:13 Thus then they were not worthy so much as to set foot on it, and yet afterwards they both came near, and beheld where God had stood. And you may, afterwards, come near, and behold: when, however, He is present, depart. You are no more allowed to be here than the Catechumen is. For it is not at all the same thing never to have reached the mysteries, and when you have reached them, to stumble at them and despise them, and to make yourself unworthy of this thing. One might enter upon more points, and those more awful still; not however to burden your understanding, these will suffice. They who are not brought to their right senses with these, certainly will not be with more.

That I may not then be the means of increasing your condemnation, I entreat you, not to forbear coming, but to render yourselves worthy both of being present, and of approaching. Tell me, were any king to give command and to say, If any man does this, let him partake of my table; say, would ye not do all you could to be admitted? He has invited us to heaven, to the table of the great and wonderful King, and do we shrink and hesitate, instead of hastening and running to it? And what then is our hope of salvation? We cannot lay the blame on our weakness; we cannot on our nature. It is indolence and nothing else that renders us unworthy.

So far have I spoken of myself. But may He that pricks the heart, He that gives the Spirit of compunction, pierce your hearts, and plant the seeds in the depth of them, that so through His fear ye may conceive, and bring forth the spirit of salvation, and come near with boldness. For, your children, it is said, are like olive plants round about your table. Psalm 128:3 O, then, let there be nothing old, nothing wild, nothing harsh. For of such sort are the young plants that are fit for fruit, for the beautiful fruit, fruit I mean of the olive-tree. And thriving they are, so as all to be round about the table, and come together here, not in vain or by chance, but with fear and reverence. For thus shall you behold with boldness even Christ Himself in heaven, and shall be counted worthy of that heavenly kingdom, which may God grant we may all attain, in Jesus Christ, our Lord with whom to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, honor, now and ever, and for ages of ages. Amen.

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