

Homily 30 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the importance of supporting the saints through contributions and prayer, highlighting the interconnectedness of the Christian community.

Scripture: Matthew 22:9, Matthew 26:41, John 4:22, Romans 15:25, 1 Corinthians 7:17, 1 Corinthians 14:36, 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2 Corinthians 8:1, 2 Corinthians 9:2, Colossians 1:6

Topics: "Christian Community", "Sacrificial Love"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of ministering to the saints, highlighting the duty of believers to support and care for one another, both spiritually and materially. He emphasizes the need for genuine acts of service and generosity, drawing examples from the contributions made by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Chrysostom encourages the Romans to imitate the sacrificial love and dedication shown by Priscilla, Aquila, and Phebe, who selflessly served and supported the early Christian community, even risking their lives for the sake of others.

Transcript

Rom. XV. 25-27

But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it has pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It has pleased them verily, and their debtors they are.

Since he had said that I have no longer more place in these parts, and, I have a great desire, these many years, to come unto you, but he still intended to delay; lest it should be thought that he was making a jest of them, he mentions the cause also why he still puts it off, and he says, that I am going unto Jerusalem, and is apparently giving the excuse for the delay. But by means of this he also makes good another object, which is the exhorting of them to alms, and making them more in earnest about it.

Since if he had not been minded to effect this, it had sufficed to say, I am going unto Jerusalem. But now he adds the reason of his journey. For I go, says he, to minister to the saints. And he dwells over the subject, and enters into reasonings, and says that they are debtors, and that, if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things, that they might learn to imitate these. Wherefore also there is much reason to admire his wisdom for devising this way of giving the advice.

For they were more likely to bear it in this way than if he had said it in the form of exhortation; as then he would have seemed to be insulting them, if, with a view to incite them, he had brought before them Corinthians and Macedonians. Indeed, this is the ground on which he does incite the others as follows, saying, Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the Churches in Macedonia. 2 Corinthians 8:1 And again he incites the Macedonians by these.

For your zeal, he says, has provoked very many. 2 Corinthians 9:2 And by the Galatians in like manner he does this, as when he says, As I have given order to the Churches of Galatia, even so do ye. 1 Corinthians 16:1 But in the case of the Romans he does not do so, but in a more covert way. And he does this also in regard to the preaching, as when he says, What? Came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you only? 1 Corinthians 14:36 For there is nothing so powerful as emulation.

And so he often employs it. For elsewhere too he says, And so ordain I in all the Churches; 1 Corinthians 7:17; and again, As I teach everywhere in every Church. 1 Corinthians 4:17 And to the Colossians he says, that the Gospel increases and brings forth fruit in all the world. Colossians 1:6 This then he does here also in the case of alms. And consider what dignity there is in his expressions. For he does not say, I go to carry alms, but to minister ($\hat{\imath}\hat{I}^{\pm\hat{\alpha}}_{\frac{1}{2}}\hat{\zeta}_{\frac{1}{2}}\hat{\Delta}_1\hat{\Xi}\hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}}$). But if Paul ministers, just consider how great a thing is doing, when the Teacher of the world undertakes to be the bearer, and when on the point of travelling to Rome, and so greatly desiring them too, he yet prefers this to that.

For it has pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia, that is, it meets their approbation, their desire. A certain contribution. And, he does not say alms, but contribution ($\hat{\imath}^0\hat{\imath}\hat{1}^{1\frac{1}{2}}\hat{2}^{\%}\hat{1}_{\frac{1}{2}}\hat{1}^{\pm 1\frac{1}{2}}$). And the certain is not used without a meaning, but to prevent his seeming to reproach these. And he does not say the poor, merely, but the poor saints, so making his recommendation twofold, both that from their virtue and that from their poverty. And even with this alone he was not satisfied, but he adds, they are their debtors.

Then he shows how they are debtors. For if, he says, the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their debt (A.V. duty) is also to minister unto them in carnal things. But what he means is this. It was for their sakes that Christ came. To them it was that all the promises were made, to them of the Jews. Of them Christ came. (Wherefore also it said, Salvation is of the Jews.) John 4:22 From them were the Apostles, from them the Prophets, from them all good things.

In all these things then the world was made a partaker. If then, he says, you have been made partakers in that which is greater, and when it was for them that the banquet was prepared, you have been brought in to enjoy the feast that was spread Matthew 22:9, according to the Parable of the Gospel, you are debtors also to share your carnal things with them, and to impart to them. But he does not say to share, but to minister (ἵνα ἡμεῖς αὐτοῖς ἐκδοῦμεν ἡμῶν τὰ σὰρκινὰ ὑμῖν, ὡς ἡμεῖς ἔλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς, ἵνα ἡμεῖς ἐκδοῦμεν ὑμῖν, ὡς ἡμεῖς ἐλάβομεν ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς), so ranking them with ministers (ἵνα ἡμεῖς αὐτοῖς ἐκδοῦμεν ἡμῶν τὰ σὰρκινὰ ὑμῖν, ὡς ἡμεῖς ἔλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς, ἵνα ἡμεῖς ἐκδοῦμεν ὑμῖν, ὡς ἡμεῖς ἐλάβομεν ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς), and those that pay the tribute to kings.

And he does not say in your carnal things, as he did in their spiritual things. For the spiritual things were theirs. But the carnal belonged not to these alone, but were the common property of all. For he bade money to be held to belong to all, not to those who were its possessors only.

Ver. 28. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed unto them this fruit.

That is, when I have laid it up as it were in the royal treasuries, as in a place secure from robbers and danger. And he does not say alms, but fruit again, to show that those who gave it were gainers by it. I will come by you into Spain. He again mentions Spain to show his forwardness (ἀνὰ τὴν Ἰσπανίαν) and

warmth towards them.

Ver. 29. And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ.

What is the force of, In the fullness of the blessing? Either he speaks of alms (Gr. money), or generally of good deeds. For blessing is a name he very commonly gives to alms. As when he says, As a blessing and not as covetousness. 2 Corinthians 9:5 And it was customary of old for the thing to be so called. But as he has here added of the Gospel, on this ground we assert that he speaks not of money only, but of all other things. As if he had said, I know that when I come I shall find you with the honor and freshness of all good deeds about you, and worthy of countless praises in the Gospel. And this is a very striking mode of advice, I mean this way of forestalling their attention by encomiums. For when he entreats them in the way of advice, this is the mode of setting them right that he adopts.

Ver. 30. Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit.

Here he again puts forward Christ and the Spirit, and makes no mention whatever of the Father. And I say this, that when you find him mentioning the Father and the Son, or the Father only, you may not despise either the Son or the Spirit. And he does not say the Spirit, but the love of the Spirit. For as Christ loved the world, and as the Father does, so does the Spirit also. And what is it that you beseech us, let me hear? To strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,

Ver. 31. That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea.

A great struggle then lies before him. And this too is why he calls for their prayers. And he does not say that I may be engaged in it, but I may be delivered, as Christ commanded, to pray that we enter not into temptation. Matthew 26:41 And in saying this he showed, that certain evil wolves would attack them, and those who were wild beasts rather than men. And out of this he also found grounds for another thing, namely, for showing that he with good reason took the office of ministering to the Saints, if, that is, the unbelievers were in such force that he even prayed to be delivered from them. For they who were among so many enemies, were in danger of perishing by famine also. And therefore there was absolute need of aid coming (or of his going) from other quarters to them. And that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the Saints.

That is, that my sacrifice may be accepted, that with cheerfulness they may receive what is given them. See how he again exalts the dignity of those who were to receive it. Then he asks for the prayer of so great a people in order to what was sent being received. And by this he shows another point also, that to have given alms does not secure its being accepted. For when any one gives it constrainedly, or out of unjust gains, or for vanity, the fruit of it is gone.

Ver. 32. That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God.

As he had said at the beginning, If by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey, by the will of God, to come unto you Romans 1:10; so here again he takes refuge in the same Will, and says that this is why I press on and wish to be delivered from them, that I may see you shortly, and that with pleasure, without bringing any load of heaviness from thence. And may with you be refreshed.

See how he again shows unassumingness. For he does not say, I may teach you, and give you a lesson, but that, I may with you be refreshed. And yet he was the very man engaged in the striving and conflict. In

what sense then does he say that I may be refreshed with you (if I...)? It is to gratify them on this point too, and to make them the more cheerful by making them sharers of his crown, and to show that they too struggle and labor. Then, as was always his custom to do, he adds prayer after the exhortation, and says,

Ver. 33. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Chap. xvi. ver. 1. I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a deaconess (A.V. servant) of the church which is at Cenchrea.

See how many ways he takes to give her dignity. For he has both mentioned her before all the rest, and called her sister. And it is no slight thing to be called the sister of Paul. Moreover he has added her rank, by mentioning her being deaconess.

Ver. 2. That ye receive her in the Lord, as becomes saints. (Gr. the saints.)

That is, for the Lord's sake, that she may enjoy honor among you. For he that receives a person for the Lord's sake, though it be no great one that he receives, yet receives him with attention. But when it is a saint, consider what attention he ought to have shown him. And this is why he adds, as becomes saints, as such persons ought to be received. For she has two grounds for her having attention shown her by you, both that of her being received for the Lord's sake, and that of her being a saint herself. And that you assist her in whatsoever business she has need (or asks, *ἡ δὲ ἀνάγκη*) of you. You see how little he burdens them. For he does not say, That ye dispatch, but that you contribute your own part, and reach out a hand to her: and that in whatsoever business she has need. Not in whatsoever business she may be, but in such as she may ask of you. But she will ask in such things as lie in your power. Then again there comes a very great praise of her. For she has been a succorer of many and of myself also.

See his judgment. First come the encomiums, then he makes an exhortation intervene, and then again gives encomiums, so placing on each side of the needs of this blessed woman her praises. For how can the woman be else than blessed who has the blessing of so favorable a testimony from Paul, who had also the power to render assistance to him who had righted the whole world? For this was the summit of her good deeds, and so he placed it the last, as he says, and of myself also. But what does the phrase of myself also convey? Of the herald of the world, of him who has suffered so much, of him who is equal to assisting tens of thousands (*ἡ δὲ ἀνάγκη*). Let us then imitate, both men and women, this holy woman and her that follows, with her husband also. And who are they?

Ver. 2. Greet, he says, Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus.

To the excellence of these St. Luke also bears witness. Partly when he says that Paul abode with them, for by their occupation they were tent-makers Acts 18:3; and partly when he points out the woman as receiving Apollos, and instructing him in the way of the Lord. Acts 18:26 Now these are great things, but what Paul mentions are greater. And what does he mention? In the first place he calls them helpers, to point out that they had been sharers of his very great labors and dangers. Then he says,

Ver. 4. Who for my life have laid down their own necks.

You see they are thoroughly furnished martyrs. For in Nero's time it is probable that there were thousands of dangers, at the time as he even commanded all Jews to be removed from Rome. Acts 8:2.

Unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the Churches of the Gentiles.

Here he hints at their hospitality, and pecuniary assistance, holding them in admiration because they had both poured forth their blood, and had made their whole property open to all. You see these were noble women, hindered no way by their sex in the course of virtue. And this is as might be expected. For in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female. Galatians 3:28 And what he had said of the former, that he said also of this. For of her also he had said, she has been a succorer of many, and of myself also. So too of this woman not only I give thanks, but also all the Churches of the Gentiles. Now that in this he might not seem to be a flatterer, he also adduces a good many more witnesses to these women.

Ver. 5. Likewise greet the Church that is in their house.

For she had been so estimable as even to make their house a Church, both by making all in it believers, and because they opened it to all strangers. For he was not in the habit of calling any houses Churches, save where there was much piety, and much fear of God deeply rooted in them. And on this ground he said to the Corinthians also, Salute Aquila and Priscilla, with the Church that is in their house. 1 Corinthians 16:19 And when writing about Onesimus, Paul unto Philemon, and to the beloved Apphia, and to the Church that is in their house. Philemon 1, 2 For it is possible for a man even in the married state to be worthy of being looked up to, and noble. See then how these were in that state and became very honorable, and yet their occupation was far from being honorable; for they were tent-makers. Still their virtue covered all this, and made them more conspicuous than the sun. And neither their trade nor their marriage ἡ ἑξουσία... ἡ ἐξουσία... ἡ ἐξουσία cf. Philippians 4:3 was any hurt to them, but the love which Christ required of them, that they exhibited. For greater love has no man than this, He says, that a man lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13 And that which is a proof of being a disciple, they achieve, since they took up the Cross and followed Him. For they who did this for Paul, would much rather have displayed their fortitude in Christ's behalf.

Let rich and poor both hear all this. For if they who lived from their labor, and were managers of a workshop, exhibited such profuseness as to be of service to many Churches; what pardon can they expect, who are rich, and yet neglect the poor? For they were not sparing even of their blood for the sake of God's will, but you are sparing even of scanty sums, and many times sparest not your own soul. But in regard to the teacher were they so, and not so with regard to the disciples?

Nay even this cannot be said. For the churches of the Gentiles, he says, thank them. And yet they were of the Jews. But still they had such a clear (ἡ ἀλήθεια... ἡ ἀλήθεια... ἡ ἀλήθεια) faith, as to minister unto them also with all willingness. Such ought women to be, not adorning themselves with broidered hair, or gold, or costly array 1 Timothy 2:9, but in these good deeds. For what empress pray, was so conspicuous or so celebrated as this wife of the tent-maker? She is in everybody's mouth, not for ten or twenty years, but until the coming of Christ, and all proclaim her fame for things such as adorn far more than any royal diadem.

For what is greater or so great, as to have been a succorer of Paul? At her own peril to have saved the teacher of the world? And consider: how many empresses there are that no one speaks of. But the wife of the tent-maker is everywhere reported of with the tent-maker (meaning perhaps St. Paul); and the width that the sun sees over, is no more of the world than what the glory of this woman runs unto. Persians, and Scythians, and Thracians, and they who dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth, sing of the Christian spirit of this woman, and bless it.

How much wealth, how many diadems and purples would you not be glad to venture upon obtaining such a testimony? For no one can say either, that in dangers they were of this character, and lavish with their money, and yet neglected the preaching. For he calls them fellow-workers and helpers on this ground. And this chosen vessel Acts 9:15 does not feel ashamed to call a woman his helper but even finds an honor in doing so. For it is not the sex (ἡ ἀνδρεία) that he minds, but the will is what he honors.

What is equal to this ornament? Where now is wealth overflowing on every side? And where the adorning of the person? And where is vainglory? Learn that the dress of woman is not that put about the body, but that which decorates the soul, which is never put off, which does not lie in a chest, but is laid up in the heavens. Look at their labor for the preaching, the crown in martyrdom, the munificence in money, the love of Paul, the charm (ἡ ἀνδρεία) they found in Christ. Compare with this your own estate, your anxiety about money, your vying with harlots (i.e. in dress), your emulating of the grass, and then you will see who they were and who you are.

Or rather do not compare only, but vie with this woman, and after laying aside the burdens of grass (ἡ ἀνδρεία), (for this is what your costly dressing is), take thou the dress from heaven, and learn whence Priscilla became such as she was. How then did they become so? For two years they entertained Paul as a : Probably Acts 19:10 and what is there that these two years may not have done for their souls? What am I to do then, you will say because I have not Paul? If you be minded you may have him in a truer sense than they.

For even with them the sight of Paul was not what made them of such a character, but the words of Paul. And so, if you be so minded, you shall have both Paul, and Peter, and John, and the whole choir of the Prophets, with the Apostles, associating with you continually. For take the books of these blessed ones, and hold a continual intercourse with their writings, and they will be able to make you like the tent-maker's wife. And why speak I of Paul? For if you will, you may have Paul's Master Himself.

For through Paul's tongue even He will discourse with you. And in another way again you will be able to receive this Person, when you receive the saints, even when you tend those that believe in Him. And so even after their departure you will have many memorials of piety. For even the table at which the saint ate, and a seat on which he sat, and the couch on which he lay knows how to pierce him that received him; even after his departure. How then, think you, was that Shunamite pierced at entering the upper chamber where Elisha abode, when she saw the table, the couch on which the holy man slept; and what religiousness must she have felt come from it?

For had this not been so, she would not have cast the child there when dead, if she had not reaped great benefit from thence. For if so long time after upon entering in where Paul abode, where he was bound, where he sat and discoursed, we are elevated, and find ourselves starting off from the places to that memory (so Field: Vulg. the memory of that day); when the circumstances were still fresher, what must those have been likely to feel, who had religiously entertained him?

Knowing all this then, let us receive the Saints, that the house may shine, that it may be freed from choking thorns, that the bedchamber may become a haven. And let us receive them, and wash their feet. You are not better than Sarah, nor more noble, nor more wealthy, though thou be an empress. For she had three hundred and eighteen homeborn servants, at a time when to have two servants even was to be wealthy. And why do I mention the three hundred and eighteen servants? She had become possessed of the whole world in her seed and in the promises, she had the friend of God Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23 for her

husband, God Himself as a Patron, a thing greater than any kingdom.

And yet, though she was in so illustrious and honorable estate, this woman kneaded the flour, and did all the other servant's offices, and stood by them as they banqueted too in the rank of a servant. You are not of nobler birth than Abraham, who yet did the part of domestics after his exploits after his victories, after the honor paid him by the king of Egypt, after driving out the kings of the Persians, and raising the glorious trophies. And look not to this; that in appearance the Saints that lodge with you are but poor, and as beggars, and in rags many times, but be mindful of that voice which says, Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it unto me.

Matthew 25:40 And, Despise not one of these little ones, because their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven. Matthew 18:10 Receive them then with readiness of mind, bringing as they do ten thousand blessings to you, through the greeting of peace. (ib. 10:12, 13.) And after Sarah, reflect upon Rebecca also, who both drew water and gave to drink, and called the stranger in, trampling down all haughtiness. However, through this, great were the rewards of hospitality she received!

And thou, if you be so minded, will receive even greater than those. For it will not be the fruit of children only that God will give you, but the heaven, and the blessings there, and a freedom from hell, and a remission of sins. For great, yea, very great, is the fruit of hospitality. Luke 11:41 Thus too Jethro, and that though he was a foreigner, gained for a relation him who with so great power commanded the sea. Daniel 4:27; Exodus 3:1 For his daughters too drew into his net this honorable prey.

Numbers 10:29 Setting then your thoughts upon these things, and reflecting upon the manly and heroic temper of those women, trample upon the gorgeousness of this day, the adornments of dress, the costly jewelry, the anointing with perfumes. And have done with those wanton and delicate airs, and that mincing walk, and turn all this attentiveness unto the soul, and kindle up in your mind a longing for the heavens. For should but his love take hold of you, you will discern the mire and the clay, and ridicule the things now so admired.

For it is not even possible for a woman adorned with spiritual attainments to be seeking after this ridiculousness. Having then cast this aside, which wives of the lewder sort of men, and actresses, and singers, have so much ambition in, clothe you with the love of wisdom, with hospitality, with the succoring of the Saints, with compunction, with continual prayer. These be better than cloth of gold, these more stately than jewels and than necklaces, these both make you of good repute among men, and bring you great reward with God.

This is the dress of the Church, that of the playhouses. This is worthy of the heaven, that, of horses and mules; that is put even round dead corpses, this shines in a good soul alone wherein Christ dwells. Let this then be the dress for us to acquire, that we also may have our praise sung everywhere, and be well-pleasing to Christ, by Whom and with Whom, etc. Amen.

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