

John 20:10-23

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus appears to Mary and commissions the disciples, emphasizing the importance of the priesthood and the need to respect and honor those in positions of authority.

Scripture: John 20:14

Topics: "Resurrection Appearances", "Priestly Ministry"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about Mary's emotional response at the tomb of Jesus, contrasting it with the disciples' reactions, highlighting her deep sorrow and the gradual revelation of the Resurrection to her through the appearance of angels. He delves into the significance of Jesus' appearance to Mary, emphasizing the gentle and gradual manner in which He revealed Himself to her, leading her to a deeper understanding. Chrysostom also discusses the importance of honoring and respecting priests, emphasizing the power given to them to remit sins and the need for the faithful to support and uplift them in their ministry.

Transcript

Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulcher, weeping.

1. Full of feeling somehow is the female sex, and more inclined to pity. I say this, lest you should wonder how it could be that Mary wept bitterly at the tomb, while Peter was in no way so affected. For, The disciples, it says, went away unto their own home; but she stood shedding tears. Because hers was a feeble nature, and she as yet knew not accurately the account of the Resurrection; whereas they having seen the linen clothes and believed, departed to their own homes in astonishment. And wherefore went they not straightway to Galilee, as had been commanded them before the Passion? They waited for the others, perhaps, and besides they were yet at the height of their amazement. These then went their way: but she stood at the place, for, as I have said, even the sight of the tomb tended greatly to comfort her. At any rate, you see her, the more to ease her grief, stooping down, and desiring to behold the place where the body lay. And therefore she received no small reward for this her great zeal. For what the disciples saw not, this saw the woman first, Angels sitting, the one at the feet, the other at the head, in white; even the dress was full of much radiance and joy. Since the mind of the woman was not sufficiently elevated to accept the Resurrection from the proof of the napkins, something more takes place, she beholds something more; Angels sitting in shining garments, so as to raise her thus awhile from her passionate

sorrow, and to comfort her. But they said nothing to her concerning the Resurrection, yet is she gently led forward in this doctrine. She saw countenances bright and unusual; she saw shining garments, she heard a sympathizing voice. For what says (the Angel)?

John 20:13

Woman, why do you weep?

By all these circumstances, as though a door was being opened for her, she was led little by little to the knowledge of the Resurrection. And the manner of their sitting invited her to question them, for they showed that they knew what had taken place; on which account they did not sit together either, but apart from one another. For because it was not likely that she would dare at once to question them, both by questioning her, and by the manner of their sitting, they bring her to converse. What then says she? She speaks very warmly and affectionately;

They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.

What do you say? Do you not know yet anything concerning the Resurrection, but do you still form fancies about His being laid ? Do you see how she had not yet received the sublime doctrine?

John 20:14

And when she had thus said, she turned herself back.

And by what kind of consequence is it, that she having spoken to them, and not having yet heard anything from them, turned back? Methinks that while she was speaking, Christ suddenly appearing behind her, struck the Angels with awe; and that they having beheld their Ruler, showed immediately by their bearing, their look, their movements, that they saw the Lord; and this drew the woman's attention, and caused her to turn herself backwards. To them then He appeared on this wise, but not so to the woman, in order not at the first sight to terrify her, but in a meaner and ordinary form, as is clear from her supposing that He was the gardener. It was meet to lead one of so lowly a mind to high matters, not all at once, but gently. He therefore in turn asks her,

John 20:15

Woman, why do you weep? Whom do you seek?

This showed that He knew what she wished to ask, and led her to make answer. And the woman, understanding this, does not again mention the name of Jesus, but as though her questioner knew the subject of her enquiry replies,

Sir, if you have borne him hence, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.

Again she speaks of laying down, and taking away, and carrying, as though speaking of a corpse. But her meaning is this; If you have borne him hence for fear of the Jews, tell me, and I will take him. Great is the kindness and loving affection of the woman, but as yet there is nothing lofty with her. Wherefore He now sets the matter before her, not by appearance, but by Voice. For as He was at one time known to the Jews, and at another time unperceived though present; so too in speaking, He, when He chose, then made Himself known; as also when He said to the Jews, Whom do you seek? they knew neither the Countenance nor the Voice until He chose. And this was the case here. And He named her name only,

reproaching and blaming her that she entertained such fancies concerning One who lived. But how was it that,

John 20:16

She turned herself, and says, if so be that He was speaking to her? It seems to me, that after having said, Where have ye laid him? she turned to the Angels to ask why they were astonished, and that then Christ, by calling her by name, turned her to Himself from them, and revealed Himself by His Voice; for when He called her Mary, then she knew Him; so that the recognition was not by His appearance, but by His Voice. And if any say, Whence is it clear that the Angels were awestruck, and that on this account the woman turned herself, they will in this place say, whence is it clear that she would have touched Him, and fallen at His feet? Now as this is clear from His saying, Touch Me not, so is the other clear from its saying, that she turned herself. But wherefore, said He,

John 20:17

Touch Me not?

2. Some assert, that she asked for spiritual grace, because she had heard Him when with the disciples say, If I go to the Father, 'I will ask Him, and He shall give you another Comforter.' c. xiv. 3, 16 But how could she who was not present with the disciples have heard this? Besides, such an imagination is far from the meaning here. And how should she ask, when He had not yet gone to the Father? What then is the sense? Methinks that she wished still to converse with Him as before, and that in her joy she perceived nothing great in Him, although He had become far more excellent in the Flesh. To lead her therefore from this idea, and that she might speak to Him with much awe, (for neither with the disciples does He henceforth appear so familiar as before,) He raises her thoughts, that she should give more reverent heed to Him. To have said, Approach Me not as you did before, for matters are not in the same state, nor shall I henceforth be with you in the same way, would have been harsh and high-sounding; but the saying,

I am not yet ascended to the Father, though not painful to hear, was the saying of One declaring the same thing. For by saying, I am not yet ascended, He shows that He hastes and presses there; and that it was not meet that One about to depart there, and no longer to converse with men, should be looked on with the same feelings as before. And the sequel shows that this is the case.

Go and say unto the brethren, that I go unto My Father, and your Father, unto My God and your God.

Yet He was not about to do so immediately, but after forty days. How then says He this? With a desire to raise their minds, and to persuade them that He departs into the heavens. But the, To My Father and your Father, to My God, and your God, belongs to the Dispensation, since the ascending also belongs to His Flesh. For He speaks these words to one who had no high thoughts. Is then the Father His in one way, and ours in another? Assuredly then He is. For if He is God of the righteous in a manner different from that in which He is God of other men, much more in the case of the Son and us. For because He had said, Say to the brethren, in order that they might not imagine any equality from this, He showed the difference. He was about to sit on His Father's throne, but they to stand by. So that albeit in His Subsistence according to the Flesh He became our Brother, yet in Honor He greatly differed from us, it cannot even be told how much.

John 20:18

She therefore departs, bearing these tidings to the disciples.

So great a good is perseverance and endurance. But how was it that they did not any more grieve when He was about to depart, nor speak as they had done before? At that time they were affected in such a way, as supposing that He was about to die; but now that He was risen again, what reason had they to grieve? Moreover, Mary reported His appearance and His words, which were enough to comfort them. Since then it was likely that the disciples on hearing these things would either not believe the woman, or, believing, would grieve that He had not deemed them worthy of the vision, though He promised to meet them in Galilee; in order that they might not by dwelling on this be unsettled, He let not a single day pass, but having brought them to a state of longing, by their knowledge that He was risen, and by what they heard from the woman, when they were thirsting to see Him, and were greatly afraid, (which thing itself especially made their yearning greater,) He then, when it was evening, presented Himself before them, and that very marvelously. And why did He appear in the evening? Because it was probable that they would then especially be very fearful. But the marvel was, why they did not suppose Him to be an apparition; for He entered, when the doors were shut, and suddenly. The chief cause was, that the woman beforehand had wrought great faith in them; besides, He showed His countenance to them clear and mild. He came not by day, in order that all might be collected together. For great was the amazement; for neither did He knock at the door but all at once stood in the midst, and showed His side and His hands. At the same time also by His Voice He smoothed their tossing thought, by saying,

John 20:19

Peace be unto you.

That is, Be not troubled; at the same time reminding them of the word which He spoke to them before the Crucifixion, My peace I leave unto you John 14:27; and again, In me you have peace, but in the world you shall have tribulation. John 16:33

John 20:20

Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.

Do you see the words issuing in deeds? For what He said before the Crucifixion, that I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man takes from you John 16:22, this He now accomplished in deed; but all these things led them to a most exact faith. For since they had a truceless war with the Jews, He continually repeated the, Peace be unto you, giving them, to counterbalance the war, the consolation. And so this was the first word that He spoke to them after the Resurrection, (wherefore also Paul continually says, Grace be unto you and peace,) and to women He gives good tidings of joy, because that sex was in sorrow, and had received this as the first curse. Therefore He gives good tidings suitable respectively, to men, peace, because of their war; joy to women, because of their sorrow. Then having put away all painful things, He tells of the successes of the Cross, and these were the peace. Since then all hindrances have been removed, He says, and I have made My victory glorious, and all has been achieved, (then He says afterwards,)

John 20:21

As My Father has sent Me, so send I you.

You have no difficulty, owing to what has already come to pass, and to the dignity of Me who send you. Here He lifts up their souls, and shows them their great cause of confidence, if so be that they were about to undertake His work. And no longer is an appeal made to the Father, but with authority He gives to them the power. For,

John 20:22-23

He breathed on them, and said, Receive the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.

As a king sending forth governors, gives power to cast into prison and to deliver from it, so in sending these forth, Christ invests them with the same power. But how says He, If I go not away, He will not come John 16:7, and yet gives them the Spirit? Some say that He gave not the Spirit, but rendered them fit to receive It, by breathing on them. For if Daniel when he saw an Angel was afraid, what would not they have suffered when they received that unspeakable Gift, unless He had first made them learners? Wherefore He said not, You have received the Holy Ghost, but, Receive the Holy Ghost. Yet one will not be wrong in asserting that they then also received some spiritual power and grace; not so as to raise the dead, or to work miracles, but so as to remit sins. For the gifts of the Spirit are of different kinds; wherefore He added, Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, showing what kind of power He was giving. But in the other case, after forty days, they received the power of working miracles. Wherefore He says, You shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea. Acts 1:8 And witnesses they became by means of miracles, for unspeakable is the grace of the Spirit and multiform the gift. But this comes to pass, that you may learn that the gift and the power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is One. For things which appear to be peculiar to the Father, these are seen also to belong to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. How then, says some one, does none come to the Son, 'except the Father draw him'? John 6:44 Why, this very thing is shown to belong to the Son also. I, He says, am the Way: no man comes unto the Father but by Me. John 14:6 And observe that it belongs to the Spirit also; for No man can call Jesus Christ Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. 1 Corinthians 12:3 Again, we see that the Apostles were given to the Church at one time by the Father, at another by the Son, at another by the Holy Ghost, and that the diversities of gifts 1 Corinthians 12:4 belong to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

4. Let us then do all we can to have the Holy Spirit with ourselves, and let us treat with much honor those into whose hands its operation has been committed. For great is the dignity of the priests. Whosoever sins, it says, ye remit, they are remitted unto them; wherefore also Paul says, Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves. Hebrews 13:17 And hold them very exceedingly in honor; for thou indeed carest about your own affairs, and if you order them well, you give no account for others, but the priest even if he rightly order his own life, if he have not an anxious care for yours, yea and that of all those around him, will depart with the wicked into hell; and often when not betrayed by his own conduct, he perishes by yours, if he have not rightly performed all his part.

Knowing therefore the greatness of the danger, give them a large share of your goodwill; which Paul also implied when he said, For they watch for your souls, and not simply so, but, as they that shall give account. Hebrews 13:17 They ought therefore to receive great attention from you; but if you join with the rest in trampling upon them, then neither shall your affairs be in a good condition. For while the steersman continues in good courage, the crew also will be in safety; but if he be tired out by their reviling him and showing ill-will against him, he cannot watch equally well, or retain his skill, and without intending it, throws

them into ten thousand mischiefs.

And so too the priest, if he enjoy honor from you, will be able well to order your affairs; but if you throw them into despondency, you weaken their hands, and render them, as well as yourselves, an easy prey to the waves, although they be very courageous. Consider what Christ says concerning the Jews. The Scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; all therefore whatsoever they bid you to do, do ye. Matthew 23:2-3 Now we have not to say, the priests sit on Moses' seat, but on that of Christ; for they have successively received His doctrine.

Wherefore also Paul says, We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us. 2 Corinthians 5:20 See ye not that in the case of Gentile rulers, all bow to them, and oftentimes even persons superior in family, in life, in intelligence, to those who judge them? Yet still because of him who has given them, they consider none of these things, but respect the decision of their governor, whosoever he be that receives the rule over them. Is there then such fear when man appoints, but when God appoints do we despise him who is appointed, and abuse him, and besmirch him with ten thousand reproaches, and though forbidden to judge our brethren, do we sharpen our tongue against our priests?

And how can this deserve excuse, when we see not the beam in our own eye, but are bitterly over-curious about the mote in another's? Do you not know that by so judging you make your own judgment the harder? And this I say not as approving of those who exercise their priesthood unworthily, but as greatly pitying and weeping for them; yet do I not on this account allow that it is right that they should be judged by those over whom they are set. And although their life be very much spoken against, you, if you take heed to yourself, will not be harmed at all in respect of the things committed to them by God.

For if He caused a voice to be uttered by an ass, and bestowed spiritual blessings by a diviner, working by the foolish mouth and impure tongue of Balaam, in behalf of the offending Jews, much more for the sake of you the right-minded will He, though the priests be exceedingly vile, work all the things that are His, and will send the Holy Ghost. For neither does the pure draw down that Spirit by his own purity, but it is grace that works all. For all, it says, is for your sake, whether it be Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas. 1 Corinthians 3:22-23 For the things which are placed in the hands of the priest it is with God alone to give; and however far human wisdom may reach, it will appear inferior to that grace.

And this I say, not in order that we may order our own life carelessly, but that when some of those set over you are careless liver, you the ruled may not often heap up evil for yourselves. But why speak I of priests? Neither Angel nor Archangel can do anything with regard to what is given from God; but the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, dispenses all, while the priest lends his tongue and affords his hand. For neither would it be just that through the wickedness of another, those who come in faith to the symbols of their salvation should be harmed.

Knowing all these things, let us fear God, and hold His priests in honor, paying them all reverence; that both for our own good deeds, and the attention shown to them, we may receive a great return from God, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, dominion, and honor, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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