

John 6:53-70

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ for eternal life, and the importance of spiritual understanding and faith in receiving this teaching.

Scripture: John 6:55-56, John 6:58, John 6:63-64, John 6:66, John 6:68, John 6:70

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Eternal Life"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of spiritual understanding and faith in Jesus' words, emphasizing the necessity of partaking in the divine mysteries with reverence and awe. He explains how Jesus' flesh and blood symbolize true spiritual sustenance and unity with Christ, leading to eternal life and the promise of resurrection. Chrysostom highlights the distinction between carnal and spiritual understanding, urging believers to seek spiritual insight and not be swayed by earthly desires. He warns against the dangers of covetousness and neglecting the poor, emphasizing the fleeting nature of worldly wealth and the eternal consequences of our actions.

Transcript

Jesus therefore said to them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have not eternal life in yourselves. Whoever eats My flesh, and drinks My blood, has life in himself.

1. When we converse of spiritual things, let there be nothing secular in our souls, nothing earthy, let all such thoughts retire, and be banished, and let us be entirely given up to the hearing the divine oracles only. For if at the arrival of a king all confusion is driven away, much more when the Spirit speaks with us do we need great stillness, great awe. And worthy of awe is that which is said today. How it is so, hear. Verily I say unto you, Except a man eat My flesh, and drink My blood, he has not eternal life in him. Since the Jews had before asserted that this was impossible, He shows not only that it is not impossible, but that it is absolutely necessary. Wherefore He adds, He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood, has eternal life.

And I will raise him up at the last day. For since He had said, He that eats of this bread shall not die for ever John 6:50, not verbally quoted, and it was likely that this would stand in their way, (just as they before said, Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead; and how sayest Thou, that he shall not taste of death? John 8:52, not verbally quoted) He brings forward the Resurrection to solve the question, and to show that (the man who eats) shall not die at the last. He continually handles the subject of the Mysteries, showing the necessity of the action, and that it must by all means be done.

John 6:55

For My flesh is true meat, and My blood is true drink.

What is that He says? He either desires to declare that this is the true meat which saves the soul, or to assure them concerning what had been said, that they might not suppose the words to be a mere enigma or parable, but might know that it is by all means needful to eat the Body. Then He says,

John 6:56

He that eats My flesh, dwells in Me.

This He said, showing that such an one is blended with Him. Now what follows seems unconnected, unless we enquire into the sense; for, says some one, after saying, He that eats My flesh, dwells in Me, what kind of a consequence is it to add,

John 6:57

As the living Father has sent Me, and I live by the Father.

Yet the words harmonize perfectly. For since He continually spoke of eternal life, to prove this point He introduces the expression, dwells in Me; for if he dwells in Me, and I live, it is plain that he will live also. Then He says, As the living Father has sent Me. This is an expression of comparison and resemblance, and its meaning is of this kind, I live in like manner as the Father lives. And that you may not deem Him unbegotten, He immediately subjoins, by the Father, not by this to show that He needs, in order to live, any power working in Him, for He said before, to remove such a suspicion, As the Father has life in Himself, so has He given to the Son also to have life in Himself; now if He needs the working of another, it will be found that either the Father has not given Him so to have it, and so the assertion is false, or if He has so given it, then He will need no other one to support Him. What then means the, By the Father? He here merely hints at the cause, and what He says is of this kind: As the Father lives, so I live, and he that eats Me shall live by Me. And the life of which He speaks is not life merely, but the excellent life; for that He spoke not simply of life, but of that glorious and ineffable life, is clear from this. For all men live, even unbelievers, and uninitiated, who eat not of that flesh. Do you see that the words relate not to this life, but to that other? And what He says is of this kind: He that eats My flesh, when he dies shall not perish nor suffer punishment; He spoke not of the general resurrection, (for all alike rise again,) but concerning the special, the glorious Resurrection, that which has a reward.

John 6:58

This is that bread which came down from heaven; not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead; he that eats of this bread shall live forever.

Continually does He handle the same point, so as to imprint it on the understanding of the hearers, (for the teaching on these points was a kind of final teaching,) and to confirm the doctrine of the Resurrection and of eternal life. Wherefore He mentions the Resurrection since He promises eternal life, showing that that life is not now, but after the Resurrection. And whence, says some one, are these things clear? From the Scriptures; to them He everywhere refers the Jews, bidding them learn these things from them. And by saying, Which gives life to the world, He incites them to jealousy, that from very vexation that others should enjoy the gift, they may not stay without. And continually He reminds them of the manna, showing

the difference, (between it and His bread,) and guiding them to the faith; for if He was able to support their life for forty years without harvest, or grain, or other things in course; much more now will He be able to do so, as having come for greater ends. Moreover, if those things were but types, and yet men collected what came down without sweat or labor; much more shall this be the case, where the difference is great both in the never dying, and in the enjoying the true life. And rightly has He spoken often of life, since this is desired by men, and nothing is so pleasing to them as not to die. Since even under the old Covenant, this was the promise, length of life and many days, but now it is not length merely, but life having no end. He desires at the same time to show, that He now revokes the punishment caused by sin, annulling that sentence which condemns to death, and bringing in not life merely, but life eternal, contrariwise to the former things.

John 6:59

These things said He in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum.

2. The place where most of His marvels had been done, so that He ought there especially to have been listened to. But wherefore taught He in the synagogue and in the Temple? As well because He desired to catch the greatest number of them, as because He desired to show that He was not opposed to the Father.

John 6:60

But many of the disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is a hard saying.

What means hard? Rough, laborious, troublesome. Yet He said nothing of this kind, for He spoke not of a mode of life, but of doctrines, continually handling the faith which is in Him. What then means, is a hard saying? Is it because it promises life and resurrection? Is it because He said that He came down from heaven? Or that it was impossible for one to be saved who ate not His flesh? Tell me, are these things hard? Who can assert that they are? What then means hard? It means, difficult to be received, transcending their infirmity, having much terror. For they thought that He uttered words too high for His real character, and such as were above Himself. Therefore they said,

Who can hear it?

Perhaps making excuse for themselves, since they were about to start away.

John 6:61-62

When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples murmured at it, (for this is an attribute of His Godhead to bring secret things to light,) He said to them, Does this offend you? What and if you shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before?

This also He does in the case of Nathanael, saying, Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig-tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these. John 1:50 And to Nicodemus, No man has ascended up to heaven but the Son of man which is in heaven. John 3:13 What then, does He add difficulties to difficulties? No, (that be far from Him,) but by the greatness of the doctrines, and the number of them, He desires to bring them over. For if one had said simply, I have come down from heaven, and added nothing more, he would have been the more likely to offend them; but He who said, My body is the life of the world; He who said, As the living Father has sent Me, so I live by the Father; and who said, I

have come down from heaven, solves the difficulty. For the man who utters any one great thing concerning himself may perhaps be suspected of feigning, but he who connects together so many one after another removes all suspicion. All that He does and says is intended to lead them away from the thought, that Joseph was His father. And it was not with a wish to strengthen, but rather to do away that stumbling-block, that He said this. For whosoever deemed that He was Joseph's son could not receive His sayings, while one that was persuaded that He had come down from heaven, and would ascend there, might more easily give heed to His words: at the same time He brings forward also another explanation, saying,

John 6:63

It is the Spirit that quickens, the flesh profits nothing.

His meaning is, You must hear spiritually what relates to Me, for he who hears carnally is not profited, nor gathers any advantage. It was carnal to question how He came down from heaven, to deem that He was the son of Joseph, to ask, How can he give us His flesh to eat? All this was carnal, when they ought to have understood the matter in a mystical and spiritual sense. But, says some one, how could they understand what the 'eating flesh' might mean? Then it was their duty to wait for the proper time and enquire, and not to abandon Him.

The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.

That is, they are divine and spiritual, have nothing carnal about them, are not subject to the laws of physical consequence, but are free from any such necessity, are even set above the laws appointed for this world, and have also another and a different meaning. Now as in this passage He said spirit, instead of spiritual, so when He speaks of flesh, He meant not carnal things, but carnally hearing, and alluding at the same time to them, because they ever desired carnal things when they ought to have desired spiritual. For if a man receives them carnally, he profits nothing. What then, is not His flesh, flesh? Most certainly. How then says He, that the flesh profits nothing? He speaks not of His own flesh, (God forbid!) but of those who received His words in a carnal manner. But what is understanding carnally? It is looking merely to what is before our eyes, without imagining anything beyond. This is understanding carnally. But we must not judge thus by sight, but must look into all mysteries with the eyes within. This is seeing spiritually. He that eats not His flesh, and drinks not His blood, has no life in him. How then does the flesh profit nothing, if without it we cannot live? Do you see that the words, the flesh profits nothing, are spoken not of His own flesh, but of carnal hearing?

John 6:64

But there are some of you that believe not.

Again, according to His custom, He adds weight to His words, by foretelling what would come to pass, and by showing that He spoke thus not from desire of honor from them, but because He cared for them. And when He said some, He excepted the disciples. For at first He said, You have both seen Me, and believe not John 6:36; but here, There are some of you that believe not.

For He knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him.

John 6:65

And He said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me except it were given unto Him from above from My Father.

3. Here the Evangelist intimates to us the voluntary character of the Dispensation, and His endurance of evil. Nor is the, from the beginning, put here without a cause, but that you may be aware of His foreknowledge from the first, and that before the words were uttered, and not after the men had murmured nor after they had been offended, He knew the traitor, but before, which was an attribute of Godhead. Then He added, Except it be given him from above from My Father; thus persuading them to deem God His Father, not Joseph, and showing them that it is no common thing to believe in Him. As though He had said, Unbelievers disturb Me not; trouble Me not, astonish Me not. I know of old before they were created, I know to whom the Father has given to believe; and do thou, when you hear that He has given, imagine not merely an arbitrary distribution, but that if any has rendered himself worthy to receive the gift, he has received it.

John 6:66

From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.

Rightly has the Evangelist said, not that they departed, but that they went back; showing that they cut themselves off from any increase in virtue, and that by separating themselves they lost the faith which they had of old. But this was not the case with the twelve; wherefore He says to them,

John 6:67

Will ye also go away?

Again showing that He needs not their ministry and service, and proving to them that it was not for this that He led them about with Him. For how could He when He used such expressions even to them? But why did He not praise them? Why did He not approve them? Both because He preserved the dignity befitting a teacher, and also to show them that they ought rather to be attracted by this mode of dealing. For had He praised them, they might, supposing that they were doing Him a favor, have had some human feeling; but by showing them that He needed not their attendance, He kept them to Him the more. And observe with what prudence He spoke. He said not, Depart ye, (this would have been to thrust them from Him,) but asked them a question, Will ye also go away? the expression of one who would remove all force or compulsion, and who wished not that they should be attached to Him through any sense of shame, but with a sense of favor. By not openly accusing, but gently glancing at them, He shows what is the truly wise course under such circumstances. But we feel differently; with good reason, since we do everything holding fast our own honor, and therefore think that our estate is lowered by the departure of those who attend on us. But He neither flattered nor repulsed them, but asked them a question. Now this was not the act of one despising them, but of one wishing them not to be restrained by force and compulsion: for to remain on such terms is the same as to depart. What then says Peter?

John 6:68-69

To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Do you see that it was not the words that caused offense, but the heedlessness, and sloth, and wrong-mindedness of the hearers? For even had He not spoken, they would have been offended, and

would not have ceased to be ever anxious about bodily food, ever nailed to earth. Besides, the disciples heard at the same time with the others, yet they declared an opinion contrary to theirs, saying, To whom shall we go? An expression indicating much affection, for it shows that their Teacher was more precious to them than anything, than father or mother, or any possessions, and that if they withdrew from Him, they had not then whither to flee. Then lest it should seem that he had said, to whom shall we go? because there were none that would receive them, he straightway added, You have the words of eternal life. For the Jews listened carnally, and with human reasonings, but the disciples spiritually, and committing all to faith. Wherefore Christ said, The words which I have spoken unto you are spirit; that is, do not suppose that the teaching of My words is subject to the rule of material consequences, or to the necessity of created things. Things spiritual are not of this nature, nor endure to submit to the laws of earth. This also Paul declares, saying, Say not in your heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down;) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) Romans 10:6-7

You have the words of eternal life. These men already admitted the Resurrection, and all the apportionment which shall be there. And observe the brotherly and affectionate man, how he makes answer for all the band. For he said not, I know, but, We know. Or rather, observe how he goes to the very words of his Teacher, not speaking as did the Jews. They said, This is the son of Joseph; but he said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God; and You have the words of eternal life; having perhaps heard Him say, He that believes in Me has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For he showed that he retained all that had been said, by recalling the very words. What then did Christ? He neither praised nor expressed admiration of Peter, though He had elsewhere done so; but what says He?

John 6:70

Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?

For since Peter said, We believe, Jesus excepts Judas from the band. In the other place Peter made no mention of the disciples; but when Christ said, Whom say ye that I am? he replied, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God Matthew 16:15; but here, since he said, We believe, Christ with reason admits not Judas into that band. And this He did afar off, and long before the time, to check the wickedness of the traitor, knowing that He should avail nothing, yet doing His own part.

4. And remark His wisdom. He made not the traitor manifest, yet allowed him not to be hidden; that on the one hand he might not lose all shame, and become more contentious; and on the other, that he might not, thinking to be unperceived, work his wicked deed without fear. Therefore by degrees He brings plainer reproofs against him. First, He numbered him too among the others, when He said, There are some of you that believe not, (for that He counted the traitor the Evangelist has declared, saying, For He knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him;) but when he yet remained such, He brought against him a more severe rebuke, One of you is a devil, yet made the fear common to them all, wishing to conceal him. And here it is worth while to enquire, why the disciples at this time said nothing, but afterwards were afraid and doubted, looking one upon another, and asking, Lord, is it I? Matthew 26:22, when Peter beckoned to John to find out the traitor, by enquiring of their Teacher which was he. What is the reason? Peter had not yet heard, Get behind me, Satan, wherefore he had no fear at all; but when he had been rebuked, and though he spoke through strong affection, instead of being approved of, had even been called Satan, he afterwards with reason feared when he heard, One of you shall betray Me. Besides, He says not even now, One of you shall betray Me, but, One of you is a devil; wherefore they understood not what was spoken, but thought that He was only reflecting upon their

wickedness.

But wherefore said He, I have chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? It was to show that His teaching was entirely free from flattery. For that they might not think that He would flatter them, because when all had left Him they alone remained, and confessed by Peter that He was the Christ, He leads them away from such a suspicion. And what He says is of this kind. Nothing abashes Me from rebuking the bad; think not that because you have remained I shall choose to flatter you, or that because you have followed Me I shall not rebuke the wicked. For neither does another circumstance abash Me, which is much more powerful than this to abash a teacher. For he that remains affords a proof of his affection, while one that has been chosen by a teacher, being rejected, attaches to him a character for folly among senseless persons. Still neither does this cause Me to refrain from My reproofs. This at least even now the heathen frigidly and senselessly urge against Christ. For God is not wont to make men good by compulsion and force, neither is His election and choice compulsory on those who are called, but persuasive. And that you may learn that the calling compels not, consider how many of these who have been called have come to perdition, so that it is clear that it lies in our own will also to be saved, or to perish.

5. Hearing therefore these things, learn we always to be sober and to watch. For if when he who was reckoned among that holy band, who had enjoyed so great a gift, who had wrought miracles, (for he too was with the others who were sent to raise the dead and to heal lepers,) if when he was seized by the dreadful disease of covetousness, and betrayed his Master, neither the favors, nor the gifts, nor the being with Christ, nor the attendance on Him, nor the washing the feet, nor the sharing His table, nor the bearing the bag, availed him, if these things rather served to help on his punishment, let us also fear lest we ever through covetousness imitate Judas. Thou betrayest not Christ. But when you neglect the poor man wasting with hunger, or perishing with cold, that man draws upon you the same condemnation. When we partake of the Mysteries unworthily, we perish equally with the Christ-slayers. When we plunder, when we oppress those weaker than ourselves, we shall draw down upon us severest punishment. And with reason; for how long shall the love of things present so occupy us, superfluous as they are and unprofitable? Since wealth consists in superfluities, in which no advantage is. How long shall we be nailed to vanities? How long shall we not look through and away into heaven, not be sober, not be satiated with these fleeting things of earth, not learn by experience their worthlessness? Let us think of those who before us have been wealthy; are not all those things a dream? Are they not a shadow, a flower? Are they not a stream which flows by? A story and a tale? Such a man has been rich, and where now is his wealth? It has gone, has perished, but the sins done by reason of it stay by him, and the punishment which is because of the sins. Yea, surely if there were no punishment, if no kingdom were set before us, it were a duty to show regard for those of like descent and family, to respect those who have like feelings with ourselves. But now we feed dogs, and many of us wild asses, and bears, and different beasts, while we care not for a man perishing with hunger; and a thing alien to us is more valued than that which is of our kin, and our own family less honored than creatures which are not so, nor related to us.

Is it a fine thing to build one's self splendid houses, to have many servants, to lie and gaze at a gilded roof? Why then, assuredly, it is superfluous and unprofitable. For other buildings there are, far brighter and more majestic than these; on such we must gladden our eyes, for there is none to hinder us. Will you see the fairest of roofs? At eventide look upon the starred heaven. But, says some one, this roof is not mine. Yet in truth this is more yours than that other. For you it was made, and is common to you and to your brethren; the other is not yours, but theirs who after your death inherit it. The one may do you the greatest service, guiding you by its beauty to its Creator; the other the greatest harm, becoming your greatest

accuser at the Day of Judgment, inasmuch as it is covered with gold, while Christ has not even needful raiment. Let us not, I entreat you, be subject to such folly, let us not pursue things which flee away, and flee those which endure; let us not betray our own salvation, but hold fast to our hope of what shall be hereafter; the aged, as certainly knowing that but a little space of life is left us; the young, as well persuaded that what is left is not much. For that day comes so as a thief in the night. Knowing this, let wives exhort their husbands, and husbands admonish their wives; let us teach youths and maidens, and all instruct one another, to care not for present things, but to desire those which are to come, that we may be able also to obtain them; through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom and with whom, to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, now and ever and world without end. Amen.

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