

Letters to Olympias - Part 1

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon encourages the listener to trust in God's power and to persevere in the face of adversity, reminding them that God's solution is always greater than any challenge we may face.

Scripture: Job 2:4, 1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Corinthians 11:30, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 1:23, 1 Timothy 5:23

Topics: "Suffering And Faith", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Chrysostom addresses the deaconess Olympias, encouraging her to endure suffering with patience and faith. He reminds her of the trials faced by Job and Lazarus, emphasizing that bodily infirmity can be a means of purification and a source of great reward. Chrysostom highlights the importance of enduring physical afflictions, even when desiring death, as a way to strengthen faith and trust in God's providence. He draws parallels to the sufferings of Paul and Timothy, showing how enduring trials can lead to spiritual growth and deeper reliance on God's grace.

Transcript

The deaconess Olympias to whom seventeen of Chrysostom's extant letters are addressed was the most eminent of his female friends. She belonged to a Pagan family of high rank, and was born about 368. Her father Seleucus who was a count of the Empire died when she was a young girl and she was brought up under the guardianship of an uncle Procopius, who was a devout Christian and a friend of Gregory of Nazianzus. Gregory took great interest in her, speaking of her in his letters as "his own Olympias" and delighting to be addressed by her as "father."

Her governess Theodosia, sister of St. Amphilochius of Iconium, was a woman whom Gregory exhorted her to imitate as the very pattern of Christian goodness. The orphan girl had great personal beauty, and was the heiress of a large fortune. Naturally therefore she had many suitors, and in 384 at the age of sixteen she was wedded to Nebrius, a young man of high rank and irreproachable character. The marriage however does not seem to have been a happy one, and perhaps in this fact as well as in the death of her husband about two years after their union, Olympias saw a divine intimation that she should not entangle herself again in the worldly cares and anxieties incident to married life.

The Emperor Theodosius wished to unite her to a young Spaniard, Elpidius, a kinsman of his own, and irritated by her refusal, ordered her property to be confiscated until she should have attained her thirtieth year, unless she consented to the proposed union. Olympias however remained inflexible and in a letter of dignified sarcasm thanked the Emperor for relieving her from a heavy burden. "He could not have

conferred a greater blessing upon her unless he had ordered her wealth to be bestowed upon the Churches and the poor."

Theodosius perceiving the uselessness, if not regretting the injustice, of his harsh decree, cancelled it, and left her in the undisturbed enjoyment of her property. Henceforward her time and wealth were devoted to the service of religion. She ministered to the necessities of the sick and poor, and supported the work of the Church in Greece, Asia Minor and Syria with such lavish donations, not only of her money but of her land, that even Chrysostom, who might be called the great preacher of almsgiving, warned her against indiscriminate liberality, reminding her that as her wealth was a trust committed to her by God she ought to be discreet in the management of it.

This salutary advice gained him the ill-will of many avaricious bishops and clergy who had profited, or hoped to profit, by her gifts. She in her turn requited the Archbishop for his spiritual care by many little feminine attentions to his bodily wants, especially by seeing that he was supplied with wholesome food, and did not overstrain his feeble constitution by a too rigid abstinence. She herself however practised the most austere asceticism, renouncing the luxury of the bath, wearing none but old coarse clothing, and subjecting herself to severe restrictions in respect of food and sleep.

After the expulsion of Chrysostom from Constantinople 404, through the intrigues of his enemies, Olympias suffered much from the persecution to which all his followers were subjected. She was accused of having been concerned in causing the fire which broke out immediately after his departure, and destroyed the Cathedral Church and the Senate House. Her intrepid demeanour before the præfect who tried in vain to frighten her into a confession of guilt, or induce her to edge Arsacius who had been intruded into the See by an arbitrary exercise of imperial power, excited general admiration; and the tidings of her fortitude were a great consolation to the exiled archbishop in the midst of much bodily suffering, and mental distress. It is not quite certain whether she was driven from Constantinople or voluntarily retired from it; nor have we any definite information concerning the remainder of her life.

To My Lady

The most reverend and divinely favored deaconess Olympias, I John, Bishop, send greeting in the Lord.

1. Come now let me relieve the wound of your despondency, and disperse the thoughts which gather this cloud of care around you. For what is it which upsets your mind, and why are you sorrowful and dejected? Is it because of the fierce black storm which has overtaken the Church, enveloping all things in darkness as of a night without a moon, and is growing to a head every day, travailing to bring forth disastrous shipwrecks, and increasing the ruin of the world? I know all this as well as you; none shall gainsay it, and if you like I will form an image of the things now taking place so as to present the tragedy yet more distinctly to you. We behold a sea upheaved from the very lowest depths, some sailors floating dead upon the waves, others engulfed by them, the planks of the ships breaking up, the sails torn to tatters, the masts sprung, the oars dashed out of the sailors' hands, the pilots seated on the deck, clasping their knees with their hands instead of grasping the rudder, bewailing the hopelessness of their situation with sharp cries and bitter lamentations, neither sky nor sea clearly visible, but all one deep and impenetrable darkness, so that no one can see his neighbour, while mighty is the roaring of the billows, and monsters of the sea attack the crews on every side.

But how much further shall I pursue the unattainable? For whatever image of our present evils I may seek speech shrinks baffled from the attempt. Nevertheless even when I look at these calamities I do not

abandon the hope of better things, considering as I do who the pilot is in all this -- not one who gets the better of the storm by his art, but calms the raging waters by his rod. But if He does not effect this at the outset and speedily, such is His custom -- He does not at the beginning put down these terrible evils, but when they have increased, and come to extremities, and most persons are reduced to despair, then He works wondrously, and beyond all expectation, thus manifesting his own power, and training the patience of those who undergo these calamities. Do not therefore be cast down. For there is only one thing, Olympias, which is really terrible, only one real trial, and that is sin; and I have never ceased continually harping upon this theme; but as for all other things, plots, enmities, frauds, calumnies, insults, accusations, confiscation, exile, the keen sword of the enemy, the peril of the deep, warfare of the whole world, or anything else you like to name, they are but idle tales. For whatever the nature of these things may be they are transitory and perishable, and operate in a mortal body without doing any injury to the vigilant soul. Therefore the blessed Paul, desiring to prove the insignificance both of the pleasures and sorrows relating to this life, declared the whole truth in one sentence when he said -- For the things which are seen are temporal. 2 Corinthians 4:18 Why then do you fear temporal things which pass away like the stream of a river. For such is the nature of present things whether they be pleasant or painful. And another prophet compared all human prosperity not to grass, but to another material even more flimsy, describing the whole of it as the flower of grass. For he did not single out any one part of it, as wealth alone, or luxury alone, or power, or honour; but having comprised all the things which are esteemed splendid among men under the one designation of glory he said all the glory of man is as the flower of grass. Isaiah 40:6

2. Nevertheless, you will say, adversity is a terrible thing and grievous to be borne. Yet look at it again compared with another image and then also learn to despise it. For the railings, and insults, and reproaches, and gibes inflicted by enemies, and their plots are compared to a worn-out garment, and moth-eaten wool when God says Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings, for they shall wax old as does a garment, and like moth-eaten wool so shall they be consumed.

Isaiah 50:7-8 Therefore let none of these things which are happening trouble you, but ceasing to invoke the aid of this or that person, and to run after shadows (for such are human alliances), do thou persistently call upon Jesus, whom you serve, merely to bow his head; and in a moment of time all these evils will be dissolved. But if you have already called upon Him, and yet they have not been dissolved, such is the manner of God's dealing (for I will resume my former argument); He does not put down evils at the outset, but when they have grown to a head, when scarcely any form of the enemy's malice remains ungratified, then He suddenly converts all things to a state of tranquillity and conducts them to an unexpected settlement.

For He is not only able to turn as many things as we expect and hope, to good, but many more, yea infinitely more. Wherefore also Paul says now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Ephesians 3:20 Could He not, for example, have prevented the three children at the outset from falling into trial? But He did not choose to do this, thereby conferring great pain upon them. Therefore He suffered them to be delivered into the hands of barbarians, and the furnace to be heated to an immeasurable height and the wrath of the king to blaze even more fiercely than the furnace, and hands and feet to be bound with great severity and they themselves to be cast into the fire; and then, when all they who beheld despaired of their rescue, suddenly, and beyond all hope, the wonder-working power of God, the supreme artificer, was displayed, and shone forth with exceeding splendour.

For the fire was bound, and the bondmen were released; and the furnace became a temple of prayer, a place of fountains and dew, of higher dignity than a royal court, and the very hairs of their head prevailed

over that all devouring element which gets the better even of iron and stone, and masters every kind of substance. And a solemn song of universal praise was instituted there by these holy men inviting every kind of created thing to join in the wondrous melody; and they uttered hymns of thanksgiving to God for that they had been bound, and also burnt, as far at least as the malice of their enemies had power; that they had been exiles from their country, captives deprived of their liberty, wandering outcasts from city and home, sojourners in a strange and barbarous land; for all this was the outpouring of a grateful heart.

And when the malicious devices of their enemies were perfected (for what further could they attempt after their death?) and the labours of the heroes were completed, and the garland of victory was woven, and their rewards were prepared and nothing more was wanting for their renown; then at last their calamities were brought to an end, and he who caused the furnace to be kindled, and delivered them over to that great punishment, became himself the panegyrist of those holy heroes, and the herald of God's marvellous deed, and everywhere throughout the world issued letters full of reverent praise, recording what had taken place, and becoming the faithful herald of the miracles wrought by the wonder-working God. For inasmuch as he had been an enemy and adversary what he wrote was above suspicion even in the opinion of enemies.

3. Do you see the abundance of resource belonging to God? His wisdom, His extraordinary power, His loving-kindness and care? Be not therefore dismayed or troubled but continue to give thanks to God for all things, praising, and invoking Him; beseeching and supplicating; even if countless tumults and troubles come upon you, even if tempests are stirred up before your eyes let none of these things disturb you. For our Master is not baffled by the difficulty, even if all things are reduced to the extremity of ruin.

For it is possible for Him to raise those who have fallen, to convert those who are in error, to set straight those who have been ensnared, to release those who have been laden with countless sins, and make them righteous, to quicken those who are dead, to restore lustre to decayed things, and freshness to those which have waxen old. For if He makes things which are not, come into being, and bestows existence on things which are nowhere by any means manifest, how much more will He rectify things which already exist.

But you will say there are many who perish, many who are caught by snares. Many such things have indeed often taken place, yet afterwards have all received their appropriate correction, save some few who have remained in an incurable condition, even after the change in their circumstances. Why are you troubled and distracted because such a person is cast out and such another is put into his place? Christ was crucified and the release of Barabbas the robber was demanded, and the depraved populace clamoured for the preservation of the murderer rather than of the Saviour and benefactor.

How many think you then stumbled at these things? How many were destroyed? But I must carry my argument yet further back. Did not He who was crucified become immediately after his birth a wanderer and a fugitive? Was He not from the very cradle removed with the whole household into a strange land, taking that long journey into a barbarous region? And this removal gave occasion to torrents of blood, and cruel murder and slaughter, and all the children of tender age were cut to pieces just as if they had been soldiers arrayed in battle, and infants torn from the breast were handed over to death, and even when the milk was in their throats, the sword was driven through their necks.

What could be more distressing than this tragedy? And these things were done by him who sought to destroy Jesus, yet the long-suffering God endured this tragical cruelty, which caused so much bloodshed,

and forbore to prevent it although He had the power, displaying his long-suffering for some inscrutably wise purpose. And when Jesus had returned from the foreign land and was grown up, war was rekindled against him on every side. First of all the disciples of John were envious of Him and tried to slander Him, although John himself behaved reverently to Him, and they said He who was with you beyond Jordan, behold the same baptizes and all men come to Him.

John 3:26 For these were the words of men who were already irritated, and agitated by ill-will, and consumed by that passion. For the same reason also one of the disciples who said these things disputed with a certain Jew and raised a contentious argument about purifying, comparing one kind of baptism with another, the baptism of John with that of the disciples of Christ. For there arose it is said, a questioning on the part of John's disciples with a certain Jew about purifying.

And when He began to work miracles how many calumniators He had! Some called Him a Samaritan and demoniac saying You are a Samaritan and hast a Devil John 8:48 others a deceiver, saying This man is not of God but deceives the multitude John 7:12 others a sorcerer saying He casts out devils through Beelzebub the prince of the Devils Matthew 9:34 and they continually said these things against Him and called Him an adversary of God, and a gluttonous, and greedy man, and a drunkard, and a friend of the wicked and depraved.

For He said, the Son of man came eating and drinking and they say behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. Luke 7:34 And when he was conversing with the harlot they called Him a false prophet; For had He been a prophet, one said, He would have known who this woman is which speaks unto Him; Luke 7:39 in fact every day they sharpened their teeth against Him. And not only did the Jews thus oppose Him, but even those who were reputed to be his brethren were not sincerely attached to Him, but even out of his own family opposition was kindled against Him. See at least how they also themselves were perverted, from the evangelist adding the remark for neither did His brethren believe in Him. John 7:5

4. But since you call to mind many who were offended and went astray, how many of the disciples do you suppose were offended at the time of the crucifixion? One betrayed Him, the others took to flight, one denied Him, and when all had abandoned Him He was led away bound without companions. How many then think you who had lately seen Him working His miracles, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, casting out devils, multiplying loaves, and doing all other kinds of wonderful deeds, were offended at that season, when they beheld Him led away and bound, surrounded by common soldiers, and followed by Jewish priests making a tumult and uproar; alone in the midst hemmed in by all his enemies, and the traitor standing by and exulting in his deed? And what was the effect think you when He was being scourged? And probably a vast multitude was present. For it was an illustrious festival which brought all together, and this drama of iniquity was enacted in the capital city, and in the very middle of the day. How many think you who were present then were offended when they saw Him bound, scourged, streaming with blood, examined before the governor's tribunal, and not one of His disciples standing by? What was the effect again when He was subjected to those manifold kinds of mockery, successively repeated, when they crowned Him with thorns, then arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, then put a reed in His hand, then fell down and worshipped Him, setting in motion every species of ribaldry and derision? How many think you were offended, how many bewildered, how many perplexed when they smote Him on the cheek and said prophesy unto us you Christ, who is He that smote you? Matthew 26:28 and when they led Him hither and there, and spent the whole day in scoffs and abuse, and ribaldry and derision in the midst of the Jewish assembly? And when the servant of the High-Priest dealt Him a blow; and when the soldiers parted His

garments among them and when He was led up to the cross, having the marks of the scourge upon His back, and was fastened to the wood, how many think you were offended? For not even then were those savage beasts softened, but became more furious than before, and the tragedy became more intense, and the ribaldry increased. For some said Ah! Thou that destroyest the temple, and in three days buildest it up; Matthew 27:40 and some, He saved others, Himself He cannot save. Matthew 27:42

And others said If you are the Son of God come down from the cross and we will believe you. Matthew 27:40

Again when they insulted Him by offering Him gall and vinegar on the sponge how many think you were offended? Or when the robbers reviled Him? Or when as I have already said, they made that dreadful and monstrous assertion that the robber and housebreaker, the man laden with the crime of murder deserved to be released rather than Jesus, and having received permission from the judge to make their choice preferred Barabbas, desiring not only to crucify Christ, but also to involve Him in infamy? For they thought that by these means they should be able to manufacture the belief that He was worse than the robber, and such a great transgressor that neither on the plea of mercy, nor of the privilege of the Festival was it possible to save Him. For they did everything with a view to slander His fame; which also was the reason why they crucified the two robbers with Him. Nevertheless the truth was not obscured, but shone forth all the more clearly. And they accused Him of usurping kingly power saying Every one who makes himself a king is not a friend of Cæsar bringing this charge of usurpation against one who had not where to lay his head. Moreover they brought a calumnious accusation of blasphemy against Him. For the High Priest rent his clothes saying He has spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Matthew 26:65 And what was the nature of his death? Was it not a violent one? Was it not the death of capital offenders? Of execrable criminals? Was it not of the vilest kind? Was it not the death of those who have perpetrated the worst offenses, and are not worthy to draw even their last breath upon the earth? And then as to the manner of his burial, was it not accomplished as a matter of favour? For a certain one came and begged for his body. Thus not even he who buried Him belonged to his own friends, to those whom He had benefited, to his disciples, to those who had enjoyed such free and salutary intercourse with Him, for all had taken to flight, all had hurried away from Him. And that base suspicion which his enemies contrived in consequence of the resurrection when they said His disciples came and stole Him Matthew 28:13 how many think you were offended, how many for a time upset by that? For the story prevailed at that time, although it was a fabrication, and was bought for money; nevertheless it held its ground among some people, after the seals (of the sepulchre were broken) after the manifest appearance of the truth. For the multitude did not know the prediction of the resurrection (and no wonder), inasmuch as even his disciples did not understand it; for we read they did not know that He must rise again from the dead. John 20:9 How many therefore think you were offended in those days? And yet the long-suffering God patiently endured, ordering all things according to His own inscrutable wisdom.

5. Then again after those days the disciples continued to live in hiding and secrecy, being fugitives full of fear and trembling, continually shifting from place to place, and even when they began to appear after fifty days, and to work miracles, they did not enjoy perfect security; but even after those events there were innumerable stumbling-blocks to offend the weaker brethren, when they were scourged, when the Church was distressed, when they themselves were driven away, and their enemies had the upper hand in many places, and raised tumults. For when they had acquired much confidence by means of the miracles which they wrought, then the death of Stephen again caused a severe persecution, and dispersed them all, and involved the Church in confusion; and the disciples were again alarmed, fugitive, and distressed. And yet

the Church continually grew, when it flourished by means of the signs which were wrought and became illustrious from the manner of its introduction. One disciple for example was let down through a window, and so escaped the hands of the ruler; others were brought out of prison by an angel and so released from their fetters; others were received into the houses of common people and artisans when they were driven out by those in authority; they were courteously treated in every way, by female sellers of purple, by tentmakers, and tanners dwelling in the outskirts of the cities, and by the sea shore. Frequently moreover they did not dare to appear in the middle of the towns; and if they did venture there themselves their entertainers did not. And thus amidst alternate trials, and respites from trial, the fabric of the Church was wrought, and they who once stumbled were afterwards set upright, and they who wandered away were brought back, and the ruined places were built up more firmly than before. For this cause when Paul prayed that the preaching of the word might proceed by a smooth course only, God rich in wisdom and resource did not yield to His disciple; nay even when many times invoked he would not consent but said my grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9 If then even now you will reckon up the good things with the painful, you will see that many events have occurred which if not positive signs and wonders do yet resemble signs, and are unspeakable proofs of the great providence and succour of God. But that you may not hear everything from me without any trouble, I leave this as your task, that you may reckon up everything accurately and compare them with the misfortunes, and by occupying yourself with this good employment may divert your mind from despondency; for you will derive much consolation from this work.

Pray say many kind words from me to all your blessed household. May you continue in good health and good spirits, most reverend and divinely favoured lady.

If you wish me to write long letters inform me of this, and pray do not deceive me by saying that you have thrown off all despondency, and are enjoying a season of rest. For letters are a remedy of the proper kind to produce great cheerfulness in you, and you will continually see letters from me. And when you write to me again do not say I have much comfort from your letters, for this I know of myself, but tell me that you have as much as I wish you to have, that you are not confounded with sorrow, that you do not pass your time in weeping, but in serenity and cheerfulness.

To Olympias

Do not be anxious on my behalf, nor rack yourself with solicitude, on account of the severity of the winter, and the weakness of my digestion, and the incursions of the Isaurians. For the winter is only what it is wont to be in Armenia; nothing more need be said about it; and it does not very seriously injure me. For in anticipation of these things I have devised many plans for averting the mischief which might arise from them; keeping up a constant fire, setting screens about the chamber in which I live, using a large number of rugs, and staying always indoors.

This indeed is irksome to me, if it were not for the benefit to be derived; for as long as I remain indoors I am not severely distressed by the cold; but if I am compelled to go out a little, and come in contact with the outer air, I suffer no small damage. Wherefore I beseech you dear lady, and entreat you as a very great favour to pay great attention to the restoration of your bodily health. For dejection causes sickness; and when the body is exhausted and enfeebled, and remains in a neglected condition, deprived of the assistance of physicians, and of a wholesome climate, and an abundant supply of the necessaries of life, consider how great an aggravation of distress is occasioned thereby.

Wherefore I beseech you, dear lady, to employ various and skilled physicians, and to take medicines which avail to correct these conditions. For a few days ago when I suffered from a tendency to vomiting, owing to the state of the atmosphere, I had recourse among other remedies to the drug which was sent me by my most discreet mistress Syncletion, and I found that no more than three days' application of it cured my infirmity. I beseech you therefore to make use of this remedy also yourself and to arrange that some more of it may be sent to me.

For having again felt somewhat upset, I again had recourse to it, and completely cured my disorder; for it allays the deep internal inflammation, draws out moisture on the skin, causes a moderate degree of warmth, infuses no little vigor, and excites an appetite for food; and all these effects I experienced in the course of a few days. Let then my most honoured lord the Count Theophilus be exhorted to take means to send some of this to me again. And do not be distressed at my wintering here, for I am in a much more comfortable and sounder state of health than I was last year; so that if you also would take the requisite care of yourself, you would be in a far more satisfactory condition.

Now if you say that your ailments have been produced by despondency how is it that you again ask for letters from me, seeing that you have not derived any benefit from them in the direction of cheerfulness, but have sunk so deeply under the tyranny of despondency as even to desire to depart out of this world. Are you ignorant how great a reward even of sickness awaits one who has a thankful spirit? Have I not often, both in person, and through letters, discoursed to you concerning this theme?

But since the pressure of business perhaps, or the peculiar nature of your sickness, and the quick succession of changes in your condition do not permit you to retain what I have said constantly and clearly in your mind, listen once more while I try to heal the wounds of your despondency by repeating the same incantations: for to write the same things, it is said, to me indeed is not grievous, and for you it is safe. Philippians 3:1

2. What is it then which I say and write? Nothing, Olympias, redounds so much to the credit of any one as patient endurance in suffering. For this is indeed the queen of virtues, and the perfection of crowns; and as it excels all other forms of righteousness, so this particular species of it is more glorious than the rest. Perhaps what I have said seems obscure; I will therefore try to make it clearer. What then is it that I affirm? Not the spoliation of goods, even if one were to be stripped bare of all one's possessions, not the loss of honours, nor expulsion from one's country, and transportation to a distant land, nor the strain of labour and toil, nor imprisonment, and bondage, nor reproaches, and abuse, and scoffings (not indeed that you are to think the courageous endurance of such things a slight kind of fortitude, as Jeremiah that great and eminent prophet proves who was not a little distressed by this kind of trial); Jeremiah xv yet not even this, nor the loss of children, even should they be torn from us in one fell swoop, nor the perpetual assaults of enemies, nor anything else of that nature, no, nor even the head and crown of things accounted painful, namely death, terrible and loathsome though it be, is so oppressive as infirmity of body.

And this is proved by the greatest hero of endurance, who, when he was encompassed by bodily sickness, thought death would be a release from the calamities which were depressing him; and when he underwent all the other sufferings, was not sensible of them, although he received blow after blow, and at last a deadly one. For it was no slight matter, but rather an evidence of the most malignant cruelty on the part of his enemy in dealing with one who was no novice in suffering, nor entering the lists for the first time, but already exhausted with the frequent repetition of assaults, to inflict upon him that deadly blow, the destruction of his children, so cruelly inflicted moreover that all of either sex were destroyed at the same

moment in early youth and by a violent end, and so instantaneous was their death that it involved their burial also.

For their father neither saw them laid upon a bed, nor kissed their hands, nor heard their last words, nor touched their hands and knees, nor did he shut their mouths, or close their eyes when they were about to die, acts which tend not a little to console parents who are being parted from their children; neither did he follow some of them to burial, and find others on his return home to console him for those who had departed; but he heard that as they were reclining on their couches at a banquet, a banquet full of love, not of excess, a table of brotherly kindness, they were all overwhelmed; and blood, and wine, the cups and the ceiling, the table, and the dust, and the limbs of his children, were all mingled together.

Nevertheless when he heard these things, and others before these which were also distressing; for they too had perished in a distressing way; flocks and whole herds had been destroyed, the latter having been consumed by fire sent down from heaven, (so said the evil messenger of this tragedy,) and the former having been all seized together by various enemies, and cut to pieces as well as the shepherds themselves; nevertheless I say when he saw this great storm stirred up in a brief moment of time affecting his lands, his house, his cattle, and his children, when he saw billow following billow, and long lines of rocks, and the darkness was profound, and the surging waves unbearable, even then he was not tortured by despondency, and scarcely seemed to feel the things which had happened, save so far as he was a man and a father.

But when he was delivered over to sickness and sores, then did he also long for death, then did he also bewail himself and lament, so that you may understand how this kind of suffering is more severe than all others, and this form of patience the highest of all. Nor is the Devil himself unaware of this fact; for when after having set in motion all these trials he perceived that the hero remained untroubled and undismayed he rushed to this as the greatest contest of all, saying that all the other calamities were bearable, as loss of child, or property, or anything else (for this is what is meant by the expression skin for skin Job 2:4) but the deadly blow was when pain was inflicted on a man's body.

And therefore when he had been worsted after this contest, he had no longer a word to utter, although on former occasions he had made the most strenuous and shameless resistance. In this instance however he found that he could not invent any further shameless device, but hid his face and retreated.

3. Think not however that it is an excuse to justify you in desiring death, that Job desired it, not being able to bear his sufferings. For consider the time when he desired it, and the disposition of his circumstances -- the law was not given, the prophets had not appeared, grace had not been shed forth as it was afterwards, nor had he the advantage of any other kind of philosophy. For as a proof that more is demanded from us than from those who lived then, and that harder tasks are assigned to us, listen to Christ, when He says Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 5:20 Do not think therefore that to pray for death now is exempt from blame, but hearken to the voice of St. Paul when he says To depart and to be with Christ is far better, but to abide in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Philippians 1:23-24 For in proportion as the strain of the affliction is increased are the garlands of victory multiplied; in proportion as the gold is heated does it become purified, the longer the merchant makes his voyage on the sea, the larger is the freight which he collects.

Do not then think that the labour now allotted to you is a slight one, but rather that it is higher than all which you have undergone, I mean that which consists in infirmity of body. For in the case of Lazarus Luke xvi (and although I may have often said this to you, it nowise hinders me from saying it now) this bodily infirmity availed for his salvation; and he departed to the bosom of the man who possessed a dwelling which he shared with all who passed by, and was continually shifting his home on account of God's command, and sacrificed his own son, his only begotten, who had been given him in extreme old age; although Lazarus had done none of these things yet he obtained this blessing inasmuch as he cheerfully endured poverty, and infirmity, and friendlessness.

For this is so great a good to those who bear anything bravely that it releases any one who may have committed the greatest sins from the heaviest burden of them; or if any one is an upright and just man it becomes an additional ground of the greatest confidence. For it is a bright wreath of victory for the just, shining far above the brightness of the sun, and it is the greatest means of purification for those who have sinned. On this account Paul delivers the man who had made the incestuous marriage to destruction of the flesh, purifying him by this means.

For as a proof that what was done did purify even from so great a stain hear his words that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 5:5 And when he was accusing others of another very awful sin, that of partaking unworthily of the holy table and those secret mysteries, and had said that such a person will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, 1 Corinthians 11:27 observe how he says that they also are purified from that grievous stain -- therefore are many weak and sickly among you. 1 Corinthians 11:30 And then by way of proving that they will not be confined to this condition of punishment, but that some profit will be derived from it, namely release from the penalties to which the sin is liable, he added: for if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

But now when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. 1 Corinthians 11:31-32 Moreover that they who have lived very righteously derive much benefit from such chastisement is plain from the case of Job, who was more illustrious after it than before, and from the case of Timothy, who although he was such a good man, and entrusted with such an important ministry, and made the circuit of the world with Paul passed not two or three days, nor ten or twenty, or a hundred, but many in succession in ill health, his body being very seriously enfeebled.

Paul shows this where he said Use a little wine for your stomach's sake, and your frequent infirmities. 1 Timothy 5:23 And he who raised the dead did not cure this man's infirmity, but left him in the furnace of his sickness so that he might therefrom contract a very great abundance of confidence. For the lessons which Paul himself had enjoyed from his Master, and the training which he had received from Him, he imparted to his disciple. For although he was not subjected to bodily infirmity, yet he was buffeted by trials not less severe, which inflicted much physical pain.

For there was given unto me he says a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me meaning by this the blows, the bonds, the chains, the imprisonments, the being dragged about, and maltreated, and tortured by the scourges of public executioners. Wherefore also being unable to bear the pain occasioned to the body by these things for this I besought the Lord thrice (thrice here meaning many times) that I might be delivered from this thorn. And then when he did not obtain his petition, having learned the benefit of the trial, he held his peace, and rejoiced at the things which happened unto him.

Therefore even if you remain at home, and are set fast in bed, do not consider your life an idle one; for you undergo more severe pains than those who are dragged, and maltreated, and tortured by executioners, inasmuch as in this excessive infirmity of yours you have a perpetual executioner residing with you.

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