

and the same ineluctable determination, because everything he did was cradled in his continuous prayer.

St Cuthbert was a great and famous wonder-worker; but the beautiful harmony of his character, so candid, so powerful, and so innocent, made him a man more wonderful than his works. He owed it to his having learned to open himself with every pore of his being to the wonder of God and his redeemed creation.

He died in his hermitage on Farne Island, on March 20th, 687, being perhaps a little less than sixty years old.



A HOMILY OF ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON THE PASSION¹

TRANSLATED BY F.R.

‘**A**ND when Jesus was in Bethania, in the house of Simon the leper, there came to him a woman having an alabaster box of precious ointment, and poured it on his head as he was at table.’ (Matt. xxvi, 6f.) At first sight it seems as though all the evangelists refer to the same woman, but in fact this is not so. I think that three of them do, but that John is describing another, and more glorious person—the sister of Lazarus. Matthew’s apparently casual mention of Simon’s leprosy is to show why the woman came so confidently to Jesus. Leprosy was a filthy and repellent disease; and yet she saw that Jesus had healed the man (or he would not have chosen to remain in his company), and had now gone to his home. This made her certain that he could easily rid her soul of sin. Again, the mention of the place, Bethania, is significant. It shows that he came of his own free-will to his passion. He had before escaped from the very clutches of the Jews; now, when their hatred was at its height, he comes to a place only a couple of miles away. This shows that his earlier escapes were part of his deliberate plan. So, as I say, when the woman saw him there, she plucked up her courage and came

¹ Homily 80 on St Matthew.

in. The woman with the issue of blood had come to him trembling with fear, though her disease was physical and she had nothing on her conscience. So it is understandable that this one should hesitate and hang back ashamed; it was her conscience which troubled her. It was not until many other women had come to him—the Samaritan, the Canaanite, the woman with the issue of blood, and others as well—that she dared to come forward. Even then she would not do it publicly, but only in the house, so ashamed was she of her impurity. All those others had come to him to have their bodies healed; she alone came with a case of conscience, for the healing of her soul. She had no bodily weakness, which makes it all the more wonderful that she should have come to him. And she did not treat him as a mere man, or she would not have wiped his feet with her hair. She honoured him as being greater than a man, and so she laid at Christ's feet the noblest part of her own body—her head.

'And the disciples seeing it, had indignation, saying: To what purpose is this waste? For this might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. And Jesus knowing it, said to them: Why do you trouble this woman? For she hath wrought a good work upon me. For the poor you have always with you: but me you have not always. For she in pouring this ointment upon my body, hath done it for my burial. Amen I say to you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which she hath done, shall be told for a memory of her.' (ibid. 8-13.) What gave the disciples this idea? They had heard Jesus saying: 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice' (Matt. ix, 13; Osee vi, 6), and blaming the Jews for neglecting the more important matters, judgment, mercy and faith; and they had listened to him preaching on the Mount about almsgiving. And so they assumed that if he would not accept the burnt offerings of the old Jewish worship, he would not accept the anointing with oil either. But in spite of this, he allowed her to do what she wanted, because he knew her intention. It was reverence and zeal which inspired her; and so in his deep love he let her pour the oil on his head. If he was ready to become man, to be carried in the womb and fed at the breast, is it any wonder that he should allow this? Just as his Father accepted the stench and smoke of burning meat, so he received the prostitute, taking her intention into account, as I said. Besides, in the Old Testament, Jacob anointed a pillar to God, and oil was

offered in the sacrifices, and priests were anointed with oil. The disciples had no idea of her intention, so their criticism was out of place. But their complaints against her prove her liberality. 'This could have been sold for three hundred pence', shows how much she had spent on the ointment, shows the extent of her generosity. Jesus rebuked them by saying: 'Why do you trouble this woman?' Then he gives them his reason, wanting at the same time to remind them again of his passion: 'She has done it for my burial'. And then a second reason: 'the poor you have always with you, but me you have not always'; and finally he adds: 'wherever the gospel shall be preached, what she has done will be told'. See how he again foretells the preaching to the gentiles on purpose to encourage the disciples at the time of his death. After the crucifixion his power would make the gospel spread over the whole world.

Who can be so grudging as not to acknowledge this? See what has happened. What he said has come true, and wherever you go throughout the world you will find this story told. Yet she was not a famous person, and there were few to witness her action. Nor was it done in public, but in a house—in a leper's house at that—with only a few disciples present. Who spread it around, then? Who told it to the world at large? It was the power of him who spoke those words. The deeds of countless kings and generals, even of those whose memory remains, have been forgotten. They overthrew cities, they walled them round, they were victorious in battle; they unfurled their proud banners and sent whole nations into slavery; but they are unknown even by hearsay, not even their laws and the statues they set up could preserve so much as their names. But that a woman who had been a prostitute poured out oil in a leper's house in the presence of ten men—this is celebrated all the world over. Years have gone by but the memory of this has not lessened; Persians and Indians, Scythians and Thracians, Sarmatians and Moors, and even those who live in the British Isles, all alike tell the story of what was done in secret in a house in Judea by a woman who had been a harlot.

How wide is God's love for us! A prostitute comes to him and he receives her. He allows her to kiss his feet, to anoint them with oil and to wipe them with her hair, and he reproves those who blame her. It would not be right for one with so much zeal to be

driven to despair. Note, too, how detached the disciples were, and how generous in almsgiving. But why did he not simply say: 'She has done a good work'? Why did he first say: 'Why do you trouble her?' It was to teach them not to demand the highest standard from weaker people, right from the start. He does not simply consider the action in itself, but makes allowances for the woman's character. If he had been making a law he would not have done this. But he spoke as he did for the woman's sake, so that the disciples would not crush her budding faith, but would cherish it. And he teaches us too that if there is anything good which anyone has done, even though it is not perfect, we should accept it, and encourage and foster it, and not look for perfection all at once. It is clear that this was what he wanted, because he told the disciples to carry a purse, though he himself had nowhere to sleep. And similarly here, the circumstances demanded that he should simply accept the woman's deed and not criticize it. If anyone had asked him, without the woman having done the action, he would not have approved of it. But once she had done it, his one thought is that she should not be upset by the disciples' reproof, but should leave him cheered and strengthened. And, in fact, once the oil had been poured out, their rebuke was superfluous.

You, then, should do the same. If you know of anyone who gives sacred vessels for the Church, or who loves to decorate its fabric, do not direct his gifts to be removed or destroyed, or you may sap his eagerness. But if he tells you before he does it, tell him to give his money to the poor. For Jesus spoke so as not to harm the woman's good-will; whatever he said, he said to encourage her. Then, as the mention of his death and burial might have left her puzzled and sad, he cheered her by his next words: 'What she has done will be told all over the world'. This was both a strength to his disciples, and a comfort and praise to her. All men, he said, will honour her; she has heralded my passion by bringing what is needed for a funeral, and no one should reprove her. I myself am so far from blaming or condemning her that I will not allow what she has done to remain unknown; the whole world shall hear what was done privately in this house. For her deed sprang from a reverent mind, fervent faith and a contrite heart. And why did he not promise her some spiritual reward? Because in assuring her of perpetual remembrance, he gave her

certainty about everything else as well. She had done a good work, which would surely have its full reward.

'Then went one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, to the chief priests, and said to them: What will you give me, and I will deliver him unto you?' (Matt. xxvi, 14f.). Then. When? After all this, after he had said 'it is for my burial', and not even that could shame him. He was not daunted, even when he heard that the gospel would be preached all over the world (for Jesus' words were filled with power); but when women, even women who had been prostitutes, were given such honour, then it was that he set himself to do the devil's work.

Why does Matthew mention his surname? Because there was another Judas. The evangelists never hesitate to say he was one of the twelve; they never tried to hide anything which might be held against them. They might simply have said he was one of the disciples; there were many others besides the twelve. But they put, 'one of the twelve', as much as to say: 'one of the group which had been handpicked, people like Peter and John'. They cared for nothing but the truth; they never tried to hide what had happened, so that while many of the miracles went unmentioned, they left out nothing that might have been a reproach; all of it, words, actions or anything else, they told it all quite openly. This applies to St John, too, even though it was he who wrote of the more profound doctrines. He especially tells of the insulting recriminations which were brought against Christ.

The depth of Judas' depravity was that he went to the high priests of his own accord, and that he betrayed for money—and for such a paltry sum. Luke says that he plotted with the magistrates (Luke xxii, 4). These had been appointed by the Romans to maintain law and order in the face of Jewish sedition. (The government of Judea had now been changed, as the prophecy had foretold.) Judas went to them and said: 'What will you give me, and I will deliver him unto you? But they appointed him thirty pieces of silver. And from thenceforth he sought opportunity to betray him.' (Matt. xxvi, 15f.) He himself was afraid of the crowds, and wanted to capture him when he was alone. O the madness of it! Avarice had totally blinded him. He had often seen him passing right through a hostile crowd with no one attacking him; and yet at the very time when he was giving so many signs of his power and divinity, Judas planned to have him

arrested. And all the while, Jesus tried both by gentleness and fear to put a stop to his devilish plans. Even at the supper he did not abandon his care for him; right up to the last day he talked to him about these things. But Judas would not help himself. Nonetheless, the Lord never ceased to play his part.

So we, too, must never fail to do all we can for sinners and the negligent, warning, teaching, encouraging, reproving and advising, even though we see no result. Christ knew that the traitor would not relent; but he never failed to do all he could, warning and threatening and sorrowing over him, not openly, but unobtrusively. At the moment of betrayal he allowed Judas to kiss him, and even this was of no avail. Covetousness is so great a sin that it turned him into a traitor and a sacrilegious thief.

So listen, now, all of you who have this same sin as Judas; listen, and be on your guard against the same disaster. Judas lived with Christ, and worked miracles, and had the benefit of so much teaching; but because he was not cured of the disease, he sank deeply into sin. But you do not even pay attention to the Scriptures, your minds are constantly fixed on material things; how much more easily will disaster come to you, unless you are always on your guard. Every day he was with Jesus, who had nowhere to lie down and sleep; and every day Christ's words and deeds taught him to have no money, and not to have two coats; and all this could not bring him to his senses. How can you hope to escape unless you summon up all your attention and care? But however bestial the disease is, if you are really willing you can easily master it, for this one reason: the desire is an unnatural one, as is obvious from all who are free from it. Natural things are common to all. But this desire arises through carelessness and neglect; that is what gives it a footing, and when once it has taken hold on a man it makes him live contrary to nature. Such people have no care for their fellow-countrymen, nor for their friends, nor for their brothers, nor for anyone at all, not even for themselves; and this is to go against nature. This vicious disease of covetousness which ensnared Judas and made him a traitor, is something quite unnatural. But why did he become like this, you say, if he had been called by Christ? Because God's call is not compulsory; it does not force the will of those who do not want to choose virtue. It warns, it advises, it does all that is possible to persuade men to do good; but it never compels those who will

not consent. So if you ask why it was that Judas turned out as he did, you will find that it was due to covetousness.

How was it that such a disaster overtook him? you may say. Because he was careless. This is what brings about changes for the worse, just as perseverance effects changes for the better. For instance, think how many there are who used to be violent, and have now become gentle; how many who were lustful, and who are now chaste; how many who were mean and grasping, and who have now generously given away their possessions. But the opposite has always been due to neglect. Giezi, for example, lived with a holy man, yet he became perverted with the same disease (4 Kings v). It is the most insidious of all evils. It makes people into plunderers of tombs, into murderers; it brings wars and quarrels, and any other evil you can name. And a person who is infected with it is useless for any job whatever, either in the army or in the government, and in private matters as well as public. If he marries, he will not choose a good woman, but a worthless one. If he buys a house, it will not be simply one that is suitable, but one that will bring in a high rent. Whatever he is buying, slaves or anything else, he will always choose the worst.

Whoever I mention—those who command armies, or rule nations, or manage households, or even the king himself—he would still be the poorest and most wretched of men, and the world's pest. He will feel like a commoner, one of the people, instead of reckoning all men's property as his own. And though he plunders the whole country's wealth, he will still think he has less than anyone. What he has now will seem as nothing compared with what he desires. Someone has rightly said: 'There is no more wicked a thing than a covetous man';¹ he puts himself up for sale and goes about making himself the common enemy of the world, and cursing because the earth does not produce gold instead of corn, because the very springs and mountains give only water and rocks. He is enraged at benefits which all enjoy, such as a good harvest; he avoids everything which will not bring him money. He is prepared to put up with anything if he gains only two farthings out of it. He hates all men, both poor and rich—the poor in case they should beg from him; the rich because their possessions do not belong to him. He thinks that everyone has robbed him, and so he hates them all for their injustice. He

¹ This appears to have been the reading of Ecclesiasticus x, 9 in a few Greek manuscripts.

does not know what plenty is, because he is never satisfied. He is the most unhappy of men, just as he who can practise self-restraint and is free from greed is most to be envied. A good man, even if he is a servant or a captive, is still the happiest of men. No one can hurt him, even if armies come from all over the world to fight against him. But a person such as we have described, perverted and vile, even if he were a king with a thousand crowns, would still suffer the bitterest pangs, even from an ordinary person. So weak is vice, so strong is virtue.

Then why be depressed if you are poor? It is like mourning at a festival—for poverty is a reason for rejoicing. Why grumble? For poverty can make you content if you look at it rightly. Why cry like a baby? For that is what you deserve to be called! Did someone hit you? Why worry? He made you more able to endure it. Has he stolen your money? Then he has relieved you of most of your worries. Has he destroyed your reputation? Even that will help to make you free. Even those who do not teach real wisdom on these matters say: 'you will not be harmed if you pay no attention to it'. Has he taken your house and land? But the whole world is open before you, and the public buildings too, whether you treat them only as works of art, or also for use. And after all, what is more pleasing and beautiful than the blue sky of heaven?

Why go on being poor and in want? The man who is poor in his soul can never be rich; but he who is rich in mind can never be poor. Perhaps I can make this clearer by another example. What is the use of a tree with thick green leaves when the root is withering? On the other hand, what harm is there if the leaves die so long as the root remains sound? Similarly, there is no possible value in money, if the soul is poor; there is no possible harm in poverty, if the soul is rich.

'But how can one be rich when one needs money?' you may ask. But then more than ever is the time when one can be rich. As I have often shown, to renounce wealth and desire nothing is a sure sign of true riches; and on the other hand to want is a sign of poverty. If this is so, then clearly it is poverty which makes one rich—because it is easier to renounce money when one is poor than when one is wealthy. It is easy to see that the rich man sets his mind on money more than the poor man does, just as it is the drunken man who is thirsty, rather than he who has

quenched his thirst. His desire is not satisfied even by excess; that rather increases it, just as fire burns more strongly when more fuel is added. The tyranny of wealth is like this; the more gold is added, the more it desires. To want more is a sign of poverty; and as the rich man is in this position, he must really be poor. And so we see that the soul is poor when it owns most riches; and is truly rich when it is most in poverty.

If you wish, think of an actual case. Let us say there are two men; one has ten thousand pounds, and the other ten. If you take the money away from both, which will grieve the more? The one who lost the ten thousand. But he would not have grieved more unless he had loved his money more. The more he loves, the more he wants. But the more he wants, the poorer he is. We desire most the things that we need most—for desire springs from need. But where there is satisfaction, there can be no desire; on the other hand our thirst is greatest when our need for drink is most urgent.

I have been saying all this to show that if we are on our guard no one can harm us. The damage comes from ourselves, not from poverty. And so I beg of you, use all your care to rid yourselves of this scourge of avarice, that we may be rich now, and enjoy eternal good things, which God grant that we may obtain, through the grace and love for men of our Lord Jesus Christ; to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.



HOMILIES OF ST LEO FOR HOLY WEEK

TRANSLATED FROM THE DOMINICAN BREVIARY BY E.H.

I. Maundy Thursday (from Sermon 58; P.L. 54, 332)

IT is now time for us, beloved children, to turn our thoughts to the passion of our Lord. The sacrilegious leaders of the Jews and their impious priests had long and often been looking for a chance to hurl themselves on Christ and vent their furious spite on him. But it was only at the solemn feast of the pasch that they received the power to do so; for this is what had been deter-