

... but no, it was always others that he waited for, that he hoped in, and I believe that *that* is love.'

If he lived with the thought of death, it was a joyous thought, and when death came it was triumphant. Suddenly ill, he was moved to the Augustinian nuns' clinic and there, to his amazement, was tended, he said, like a prince, nor could he get over his Superior's attentions, once looking in at one o'clock in the morning. The telephone from all over France rang all day, anxious enquirers wore out the doorstep, the Archbishop in person brought his blessing. A watcher kept an hour-by-hour record; le Père's patience and gratitude for any care, his indomitable spirit. 'Quick, quick', he reminded Mlle Rougier when once she came to his bedside, 'the proofs of Père Albert must be done in twenty-four hours', as well, it must be added, as an incredible amount of work! 'Go back to the Lycée', he commanded her another time; no slackness on his account, dying or not. He prayed, of course, incessantly and 'Oh! you have spoilt my death, I was so ready', he told one of the doctors who said he was a little better.

'God granted Père Valensin to die as he had hoped and asked for', wrote the daily watcher. 'Oh! no, please! Let in the light, let in the sun!' Père Valensin said when a nurse would have closed the shutters against the morning. 'It is a joyous annunciation, that of death'; that of the meeting with his Father of which he had written, with that of the kindness and tenderness of God. 'His death', wrote the witness of his last days, 'is the most luminous and priestly lesson of his shining career.'



THE HOMILIES OF ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON THE PASSION: I¹

AND it came to pass, when Jesus had ended all these words, he said to his disciples: You know that after two days shall be the pasch, and the Son of man shall be delivered up to be crucified.² This was a good opportunity for him to speak of the Passion. He had been reminding them of the Kingdom and its reward, and of

¹ Homily 79 on St Matthew's Gospel.

² Matt. 26, 1-2.

everlasting punishment; and he seemed to be saying: Why be afraid of sufferings which pass away so quickly when the good things of heaven await you? Notice, too, how he led up gradually to what he knew would grieve the disciples, and softened its impact upon them. Instead of saying: You know that after two days I am to be betrayed, he said: You know that after two days is the pasch; and then added that he would be betrayed and crucified. He showed that these events were to be a 'mystery',³ that the celebration of this feast would accomplish the salvation of the world, and that he himself foresaw all the sufferings he would have to undergo. This was enough to encourage them, so he said no more now about his Resurrection; he had so often spoken of it before that it was unnecessary to mention it all again. And, as I have said, by reminding them of the benefits of the old Passover in Egypt, he showed that his own Passion would save them from untold evils.

*Then were gathered together the chief priests and ancients of the people into the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas; and they consulted together, that by subtilty they might apprehend Jesus, and put him to death. But they said: Not on the festival day, lest perhaps there should be a tumult among the people.*⁴ This is a sign of how corrupt the Jewish state was. They were planning a crime, and they come for support to the high priest, the very person who should have opposed them. How many high priests were there? The Law allowed for one, but at that time there were many—another indication of the break-up of Judaism. Moses, as I said, laid down that there should be one high priest, and that at his death another should take his place; and the term of banishment of a man who had committed manslaughter was measured by the life of the high priest. Then why were there several at this time? Because later they were elected for a period of one year. This is what Luke means when he says of Zachary that he was 'of the course of Abia'.⁵ So here, when Matthew talks of 'chief priests', he refers to all who had held the office.

3 The Greek word 'mysterion' meant 'sacrament', not only in the limited sense of 'the seven sacraments', but also (as here) in the wider sense of any action of God which effects what it signifies.

4 Matt. 26, 3-5.

5 Luke 1, 5. The usual explanation of this is that Zachary was descended from Abia, one of Aaron's twenty-four grandsons, to whom was given the task of officiating by turn in the Temple. Chrysostom seems to have some other explanation, but his meaning is none too clear.

What plans were they discussing? To capture him secretly, or to murder him? Both; because they were afraid of the people. That was why they were waiting till the feast was over; 'not on the festival-day', they said. The devil did not want the Passion to take place during the Passover, because it would be too conspicuous; but the chief priests, because they feared a riot. They had no fear of God, nor of their own guilt in sinning during the festival; they only feared men. But they were so overcome by their hatred that they changed their plan. Although they said: 'Not on the festival-day', they had no sooner found a betrayer than they murdered him. Why did they arrest him then? They had been on the watch for him, as I said; but their passion blinded them. He used their fury to work out their own salvation, but that does not make them guiltless; their evil will merit them eternal punishment. This was a time when every prisoner should have been released, even the guilty. Yet they killed the Innocent One who had loaded them with benefits, and had for so long neglected the Gentiles to give them his whole attention. But see his loving mercy! Though they were so perverted and full of evil, he again saves them; he sends the Apostles to die for their sakes and to plead for them; 'for we are ambassadors of Christ'.

Now although we have examples such as theirs before us, I do not say: Let us die for our enemies. We ought to, indeed; but at the moment we are still too weak for this. At least, then, let us not disparage our friends, or be jealous of our benefactors. For the time being I shall not say: Let us do good to those who ill-treat us. This is what I long to see; but since you are still so listless, at least do not try to get your own back.

How can you turn away, untouched, as though this were merely a story? Is it for nothing that the Gospels tell us of his life and especially of his death—a life and death that had power to convert even his persecutors? No; it was all recorded so that you could imitate his goodness, and try to equal his love for men. He made them fall to the ground, he healed the servant's ear, he spoke with restraint; on the cross he worked miracles, he darkened the sun, burst the rocks, raised the dead, and by a dream frightened the wife of his judge. His unflinching meekness during the trial should have won them over no less than the miracles. In the judgment hall, it was he who warned them of the future. On the cross he cried: 'Father, forgive them their sin'. Even after his

burial think what he did for them; and how, when he had risen, he at once called the Jews, gave them forgiveness of their sins and laid infinite blessings upon them. And what can be more wonderful than this, that those very men who had crucified him and were still breathing out murder, should afterwards become sons of God? What care he shows! When we hear this we should be ashamed that we are still so different from him whom we are commanded to imitate. How far we are from him! We stand condemned because we continue to squabble with people for whom Christ gave his life; we refuse to be reconciled to those whom Christ died to reconcile. But perhaps this would involve you in some expense, and I know how reluctant you are to give alms.

Think of your own guilt, and you will not be so slow to forgive. You will even go out of your way to meet people who have injured you, to give an opportunity of pardon and help to overcome your own sinful habits. Pagans will often show wisdom in this way, and not regard it as anything outstanding. Yet you, who are going forward to such high hopes, you shirk and hesitate to do anything. Yes, time will soften your anger; but cannot the law of God persuade you to overcome it sooner? Would you rather it was conquered with some benefit to yourself, or without? If you wait for time to heal you will have no reward; instead you will be punished, because God's law could not make you do what time has done. If you say you smart under the memory of the insult, try to remember if the person who has insulted you has also done you any good. Think, too, how often you have offended others. Has a man slandered or disparaged you? Remember that you have done the same to others; can you expect pardon if you do not forgive? Even if you have never spoken uncharitably about others, you have heard people doing so and have approved of it. That will not leave you without guilt.

When will you learn how much better it is not to nurse your injuries? This would please God more than anything. But if you crow over men whom God rightly punishes, he will punish you too. However justified their punishment, you must never gloat over them. In his list of accusations against the wealthy, Amos says: 'they are not concerned for the affliction of Joseph'; and, similarly, Micheas says: 'the people of Enan did not stir themselves to grieve for their neighbours'.⁶ It was God's will that Joseph

⁶ Amos 6, 6. Micheas 1, 11 (Septuagint).

(that is the tribe descended from him), and the neighbours of Enan, should be punished; but he also expects us to show sympathy for such people. If we were punishing a servant and another by began to laugh, we would become angry and turn the punishment on him; and we are sinners. How much more will God punish those who take a delight in the misfortunes of others. We must never ride roughshod over those who are punished by God, but must grieve with them; and even more with those who have sinned against us. This is a sign of love, of that love which God sets before all else. The flowers and dyes which go to make up the royal purple are reckoned the most precious of their kind. So, too, the virtues which maintain love are prized more highly than all. And nothing preserves love so well as not remembering the injuries that others have done us.

'But surely', you may say, 'God watches over the other person also? Surely he urges the sinner to return to the one he has wronged: Does he not send him from the altar to find the other, and after they are reconciled, call him back?' Yes; but do not wait for him to come to you, or you will lose everything. He has promised a most wonderful reward to those who do this, who go out to find the one who has injured them. If you are reconciled by his pleadings then the reconciliation is due to his efforts and not to God's command: he goes away rewarded while you do not. What can you say? Are you not ashamed to have enemies? Is the devil not enough for us, or must we look for enemies among our fellow-men as well? I only wish the devil had not made war on us! I only wish he were not a devil!

Do you not realize what joy a reconciliation brings? It may not seem much at the time until the quarrel has been healed; but then we can learn that it is far better to love than to hate one who has injured us. Why then do we imitate the insane, preying upon one another and struggling with ourselves? Hear how the Old Law spoke of this: 'the path of a vindictive man leads towards death'; 'a man stores up his anger against another, and will he seek forgiveness from God?'⁷ 'But he allowed an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth', you may say; 'why should he find fault? But this was not allowed so that we could practise it on one another, but so that the fear of it should keep us from sinning. Besides, it is one thing to give way to a spasm of anger, but quite

⁷ Proverbs 12, 28 (Septuagint). Ecclus. 28, 3.

a different matter to bear a permanent grudge. That is the sign of a soul bent on evil. You say you have suffered injuries? Not such crippling ones as you will do to yourself by harbouring them. Besides, a virtuous man is really proof against real harm. Imagine, now, a man with a wife and family, a man of property, wealth and position, who has many friends and a good reputation—all of them things which can be damaged. But, most important, he is a man who is striving after virtue. Now imagine he meets with one disaster after another. Some crook comes into contact with him, and he loses most of his money. How will this affect one who sets no value on money? His children are killed, but he has learned wisdom through his faith in the Resurrection. His wife dies. But he knows not to grieve for those who sleep. He loses his reputation. But what is this to one who reckons that present things are no more lasting than grass? Even if he is tortured and thrown into prison, what will this be to a man who knows that 'though our outward man is corrupted, yet the inward man is renewed'; and that 'troubles make a man proved and tested'?⁸ I said at the start that he would not be harmed; but as you see he is in fact benefited, 'renewed' and 'tested'.

So let us not be vexed by others, not let our souls be wounded and enfeebled. These troubles spring from our own weakness, not from our neighbour's wickedness. That is why if anyone slights us, we are fretful and dejected. If anyone robs us we behave like children whom the quick-witted ones provoke and tease with practical jokes; if they are roused the teasing continues, but if they laugh it off, it stops. But we fly in a temper at things which should make us laugh.

And so I beg of you, rid yourselves of this childishness, and grasp hold of heaven. Christ would have us men—whole and perfect men. And Paul commands it: 'brethren, do not be children in mind, but in malice be babes'.⁹ Let us try then to be babes in malice, to run from wickedness and grasp hold of virtue. So we shall reach eternal happiness, by the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ; to him be glory and power, world without end. Amen.