

symbol obscures the vision which prompts men to seek the reality. My point here is that Rome too has suffered through the schism, in particular because every schism hinders the fulfilment of the manifestation of catholicity. There are Catholics other than Latins who worship through the idiom of their own cultural and historical heritage—the term ‘rite’ is often interpreted too narrowly—but practically speaking one has to admit that they are regarded by their very much more numerous Latin brethren as ‘minority groups’. For the most part unfortunately we tend to look on minorities as—at best—a challenge to our tolerance, if not as an actual inconvenience to be accommodated, for undoubtedly the social pressure to conformity is always very great.

Among these Catholics are groups following the Byzantine rite in Arabic, Greek and Slavonic, whose liturgy and devotional practices are similar to those of the corresponding Orthodox Churches. There are also Catholics of other eastern rites, represented by the Copts and the long-established Christian communities in South India. All these groups have been much encouraged by the personal concern and affection expressed by Pope John XXIII for the eastern Christians. They need encouragement because they occupy an isolated position as minorities also in their own countries, and because they are well aware that in order for their fellow-countrymen of dissident eastern churches to be brought into communion with the holy see, the warmth of human sympathy and welcome is needed over and above any doctrinal agreements which may be signed.



ONE IN CHRIST

Texts from St John Chrysostom

FABIAN RADCLIFFE, O.P.

SOME have claimed St John Chrysostom as the greatest Christian preacher of all time. Whether this is true or not is hard to say; and in any case it is doubtful if the discussion of such a claim would be of much value. What is certainly true however is that he had all the qualities needed to make a great preacher. He was a man of strong convictions, with the power to

express them in vivid, forceful language; concrete and practical in his illustrations; able to evoke the whole range of human feelings, but always with complete sincerity. In himself he was affectionate, generous and open; lacking the tact that might have enabled him to steer more safely through his enemies' intrigue, but quite without fear; ready with sympathy for all he met, so that he made and held many friends, and when preaching, could catch and hold the attention of his hearers. He did not have the speculative mind which enabled Athanasius, Basil and Cyril of Alexandria to contribute so much to theological development. He stands as a witness rather than a thinker; and his practical bent puts him nearer to some of the western fathers, Ambrose, Leo and Gregory, for example. If we study Chrysostom's theology, it is not in search of original thought, but of original expression—the living expression of truths of faith which we hold in common with him.

Three such truths, connected together and constantly repeated, seem to stand out in his writings: the real presence of our Lord in the eucharist, the incorporation of the Christian into Christ, and as a consequence the need for practical charity and justice. The real presence is always treated with great realism. 'When you see the Lord sacrificed and lying on the altar, and the priest standing in prayer, and everyone reddened with that precious blood, can you any longer think that you are still among men, still on the earth, and not rather in heaven?' (*On the Priesthood*, bk III, sect. 4; PG 48:642). 'He not only gave himself to be seen by those who longed for him, but he gave himself in the flesh to be handled, to be eaten, to be crushed by our teeth, to be knit together with us, so as to fulfil all our desires' (*Homily 46 on St John*; P.G. 59:260). "'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" Fearful words, but full of faith. For he tells us that what is in the chalice is what flowed from Christ's side; that is what we receive' (*Homily 24 on I Cor.*; P.G. 61:199).

Always this realism is used for a practical purpose—to urge his hearers to frequent and reverent communion. 'How many people say: "If only I could see Christ, his face and his figure, his clothes and his sandals!" But you do see him, you even eat him. You long to see his clothes, and yet he gives himself to you, not only for you to see but also to touch, to eat and to receive into

yourself. So no one should approach the altar carelessly or despairingly. Come with burning hearts, fervent and alert' (*Homily 82 on St Matthew*; P.G. 58:743).

This realism is often startling, but must not mislead us. He was not preaching a crude and debased doctrine, but was trying to drive home to his turbulent and unrefined, but always loyal, people the invisible realities of their faith. 'Let us trust God in everything and never doubt him, even though what he says seems to go against our ideas and our senses. His word should carry greater weight than our thoughts or our sight. That is how we should approach this sacrament, not only looking at the things before us, but fixing our minds on what God has said. His word cannot deceive, but our senses are easily led astray. He cannot fail, though our senses so often play us false. His word is: "This is my body". Then let us be convinced and believe, and see it with the eyes of the mind' (*Homily 82 on St Matthew*; P.G. 58:743). 'When you see the body of Christ laid on the altar, say to yourself: "because of this body I am no longer dust and ashes, no longer a slave, but free. Now I hope for heaven and for the good things that are laid up for us there—eternal life, the lot of the angels, communion with Christ"' (*Homily 24 on 1 Cor.*; P.G. 61:203).

Our incorporation into Christ is the chief effect of the eucharist and on this Chrysostom dwells often and with great eloquence. 'We must try to penetrate the mystery of this sacrament, what in fact it is, why it was given, and what is its value. "We are one body", says St Paul, and "members of his flesh and of his bones". . . . But Christ wants us to become this not by love only but by being united in very reality with his flesh. And this he does through the food which he has given us, for he longs to show the love he has for us. So he has knit himself to us, and planted his body in us, now making us one, like a body joined to its head' (*Homily 46 on St John*; P.G. 59:260). 'He was not content simply to become man and to be scourged and killed; he joins himself to us, not simply by faith but by making us literally his body. How pure, then, must be one who shares in this sacrifice; how pure the hand which is to break the body, the mouth which is filled with spiritual fire, and the tongue which is reddened with his sacred blood! Think of the honour which is given you; think of the table at which you share. Angels tremble at the sight of his body, and dare not look at it without awe because of the dazzling light

which pours from it. Yet it is with this that we are fed, with this that we are joined and mingled; and so we become one flesh and one body with Christ. "Who shall proclaim the powers of the Lord, and who shall set forth all his praise?" Find me a shepherd who feeds his sheep with his own body! Why, even a mother will sometimes put out her child to a wet-nurse after it is born. But he would never do this. He himself feeds us with his own blood, and in every possible way entwines us with himself. . . . He mingles himself with each one of us in this sacrament; he himself nourishes his own children, and does not hand them over to others; and his care again convinces us that he has taken our human flesh' (*Homily 82 on St Matthew*; P.G. 58:743-4).

Not only the eucharist, but more radically faith and baptism incorporate us into Christ. Commenting on Galatians iii, 26, 'for you are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ', he says: "Through faith, not through the law. And since this is such a high mystery, Paul speaks of the mode and manner of our sonship: "for as many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ". Why doesn't he say: "for as many as have been baptized into Christ, have been born of God"?—this is what we would expect since he wants to show that we are sons. But he says it in a far more wonderful way. For if Christ is the Son of God, and you have put on Christ, and having Christ you are in him made like to him, then you are of the same family and likeness as Christ. "In him is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; but you are all one person in Christ Jesus" . . . that is, you have all one form, one likeness, which is Christ's. Could you find any more astounding words? The Greek, the Jew, the slave, all now bear the form, not of an angel or archangel, but of the Lord of all, and in themselves show forth Christ' (*Homily on Galatians iii*; P.G. 61:656).

Our incorporation into Christ, therefore, unites us both to Christ and to one another. "The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ?" Why doesn't Paul say "a sharing"? Because he wanted to say more, to show a much closer union. For we communicate, not by sharing or receiving a part, but by being made one. So just as this body is made one by Christ, you too are made one by him through this bread. . . . Paul has just said: "communion in the body of Christ". But the communicant is distinct from that in which he communicates;

yet Paul would remove even this apparently slight difference . . . so he continues: "for we being many are one bread, one body". Why, he says, do we speak even of "communion", since we *are* this body. For what is the bread? The body of Christ. And what do the communicants become? The body of Christ—not many bodies, but one. Bread is made of grains of wheat so united that you can no longer distinguish them from one another; they still exist, but their separateness is made invisible by their union. So too we are joined to one another and to Christ. . . . If this is so, and we all become the same, why don't we also show the same love, and become one in that way too?' (*Homily 24 on I Cor.*; P.G. 61:200.)

This leads to the third idea, the need to show our union with one another in Christ by practical charity, justice, patience, chastity and above all almsgiving; and on this Chrysostom speaks his most tender and terrible words. 'Perhaps you say to yourself: "if I were asked to receive Paul as my guest I should do so most willingly"'. But don't you see: you can have Paul's master as your guest if you want to. He has told us himself: "whosoever receiveth one such little child receiveth me" (Matt. xviii, 5). The humbler this brother is, the more truly do we receive Christ in him. For often it is out of vanity that we associate with important people; but to invite a "little one" is to act purely for Christ.' (*Homily 45 on Acts*; P.G. 60:318.) It is better to give to the poor than to decorate the church. 'What is the use of loading Christ's table with gold, if he himself is dying with hunger? First satisfy his hunger, and then decorate his table with what is left . . . we must attend to both, but to Christ first' (*Homily 50 on St Matthew*; P.G. 58:509).

Faced by extremes of wealth and poverty, Chrysostom insisted so often on this that his hearers became exasperated. 'We men must imitate the women at Christ's sepulchre. Even when he was dead they spent their money for him, and risked their lives; but we do not feed the hungry or clothe the naked, and we pass by the beggars in the street (yes, I am back on the same old subject!). If any of you saw Jesus, you would give up all you had for him. But he is still here now. He said "I am he"; then why not give up all? You can hear him say: "you do it for me". It makes no difference if you give to a man here, or to Jesus himself. Your opportunities are no less than those of the women

who fed him; in fact they are greater' (*Homily 88 on St Matthew*; P.G. 58:778). 'You wear jewels worth hundreds of pounds while a member of Christ cannot even get the food he needs' (*Homily 89 on St Matthew*; P.G. 58:787). 'Even your dog is gorged with food, while Christ faints with hunger' (*Homily 17 on 2 Cor.*; P.G. 61:522). 'What I am about to say is severe, and may make you shudder, but I must say it: reckon Christ as one of your slaves. You give freedom, surely, to your slaves? Then free Christ from hunger and need and imprisonment and nakedness. Does this sound terrible? Far more terrible if you do not do it' (*Homily 18 on Romans*; P.G. 60:582).

And in conclusion we may see how Chrysostom pictures the incarnation as extended in the poor. 'Christ was not content to endure the cross and death; he willed to become a poor pilgrim, a beggar. He willed to be naked, to be thrown into prison, and to suffer sickness, so that at least these might move you. "If you will give me no return for the sufferings I endured for you", he says, "take pity on my poverty. . . . I suffered hunger for you then, and I suffer it for you now. I was thirsty as I hung on the cross, and still I thirst in the poor, so as to draw you to myself and make you merciful for your own salvation. . . . Though I could feed myself, I go begging. That is why I stand with outstretched hand at your door. I long to be fed by you, for I love you ardently. Like all who love I am happy to be at your table. I am proud to be there, and I shall proclaim you before the whole world: "Behold him who fed me!"' (*Homily 15 on Romans*; P.G. 60:547-8.)

