

Catechetical Lecture I

Cyril of Jerusalem

Early Church (pre-Nicene) · Nicene & Post-Nicene · Catechesis

STROMATA 37

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INTRODUCTION

Delivered around 350 in Jerusalem to candidates preparing for Easter baptism, this opening address inaugurates a series of twenty-four lectures that would become the most detailed surviving account of fourth-century catechesis and shape the structure of Christian initiation in both East and West. Cyril speaks extempore on the very ground of Golgotha, addressing men and women who have just enrolled their names for the font and stand weeks away from the rites themselves. The tone is urgent and pastoral rather than systematic: a bishop pressing his hearers to grasp what is about to happen to them, alternating between scriptural exhortation, warnings against insincere motives, and glimpses of the mysteries he will not yet name. Read it as a threshold sermon, meant to be heard while standing, in Lent, with everything still ahead.

To those who are to be Enlightened, delivered extempore at Jerusalem, as an Introductory Lecture to those who had come forward for Baptism :

With a reading from Isaiah

Wash you, make you clean; put away your iniquities from your souls, from before my eyes, and the rest Isaiah 1:16 .

Disciples of the New Testament and partakers of the mysteries of Christ, as yet by calling only, but ere long by grace also, _make you a new heart and a new spirit_ Ezekiel 18:31, that there may be gladness among the inhabitants of heaven: for _if over one sinner that repents there is joy_, according to the Gospel Luke 15:7, how much more shall the salvation of so many souls move the inhabitants of heaven to gladness. As you have entered upon a good and most glorious path, run with reverence the race of godliness. For the Only-begotten Son of God is present here most ready to redeem you, saying, _Come unto Me all that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest_. Matthew 11:28 You that are clothed with the rough garment of your offenses, who are _holden with the cords of your own sins_, hear the voice of the Prophet saying, _Wash you, make you clean, put away your iniquities from before My eyes_ Isaiah 1:16: that the choir of Angels may chant over you, _Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered_. You who have just lighted the torches of faith , guard them

carefully in your hands unquenched; that He, who erewhile on this all-holy Golgotha opened Paradise to the robber on account of his faith, may grant to you to sing the bridal song.

If any here is a slave of sin, let him promptly prepare himself through faith for the new birth into freedom and adoption; and having put off the miserable bondage of his sins, and taken on him the most blessed bondage of the Lord, so may he be counted worthy to inherit the kingdom of heaven. _Put off_, by confession, _the old man, which waxes corrupt after the lusts of deceit_, that you may _put on the new man, which is renewed according to knowledge of Him that created him_. Get you _the earnest of the Holy Spirit_ 2 Corinthians 1:22 through faith, that you may be able to be received _into the everlasting habitations_. Luke 16:9 Come for the mystical Seal, that you may be easily recognised by the Master; be numbered among the holy and spiritual flock of Christ, to be set apart on His right hand, and inherit the life prepared for you. For they to whom the rough garment of their sins still clings are found on the left hand, because they came not to the grace of God which is given through Christ at the new birth of Baptism: new birth I mean not of bodies, but the spiritual new birth of the soul. For our bodies are begotten by parents who are seen, but our souls are begotten anew through faith: _for the Spirit blows where it lists_ John 3:8: and then, if you be found worthy, you may hear, _Well done, good and faithful servant_ Matthew 25:21, when you are found to have no defilement of hypocrisy in your conscience.

For if any of those who are present should think to tempt God's grace, he deceives himself, and knows not its power. Keep your soul free from hypocrisy, O man, because of Him _who searches hearts and reins_. For as those who are going to make a levy for war examine the ages and the bodies of those who are taking service, so also the Lord in enlisting souls examines their purpose: and if any has a secret hypocrisy, He rejects the man as unfit for His true service; but if He finds one worthy, to him He readily gives His grace. He gives not holy things to the dogs Matthew 7:6; but where He discerns the good conscience, there He gives the Seal of salvation, that wondrous Seal, which devils tremble at, and Angels recognise; that the one may be driven to flight, and the others may watch around it as kindred to themselves. Those therefore who receive this spiritual and saving Seal, have need also of the disposition akin to it. For as a writing-reed or a dart has need of one to use it, so grace also has need of believing minds.

You are receiving not a perishable but a spiritual shield. Henceforth you are planted in the invisible Paradise. Thou receive a new name, which you had not before. Heretofore you were a Catechumen, but now you will be called a Believer. You are transplanted henceforth among the spiritual olive-trees, being grafted from the wild into the good olive-tree Romans 11:24, from sins into righteousness, from pollutions into purity. You are made partaker of the Holy Vine. Well then, if you abide in the Vine, you grow as a fruitful branch; but if you abide not, you will be consumed by the fire. Let us therefore bear fruit worthily. God forbid that in us should be done what befell that barren fig-tree Matthew 21:19, that Jesus come not even now and curse us for our barrenness. But may all be able to use that other saying, _But I am like a fruitful olive-tree in the house of God: I have trusted in the mercy of God for ever_ — an olive-tree not to be perceived by sense, but by the mind, and full of light. As then it is His part to plant and to water, so it is yours to bear fruit: it is God's to grant grace, but yours to receive and guard it. Despise not the grace because it is freely given, but receive and treasure it devoutly.

The present is the season of confession: confess what you have done in word or in deed, by night or by day; _confess in an acceptable time, and in the day of salvation_ 2 Corinthians 6:2 receive the heavenly treasure. Devote your time to the Exorcisms: be assiduous at the Catechisings, and remember the things that shall be spoken, for they are spoken not for your ears only, but that by faith you may seal them up in the memory. Blot out from your mind all earthly care: for you are running for your soul. You are utterly forsaking the things of the world: little are the things which you are forsaking, great what the Lord is giving. Forsake things present, and put your trust in things to come. Have you run so many circles of the years busied in vain about the world, and have you not forty days to be free (for prayer), for your own soul's sake? _Be still_ , _and know that I am God_, says the Scripture. Excuse yourself from talking many idle words: neither backbite, nor lend a willing ear to backbiters; but rather be prompt to prayer. Show in ascetic exercise that your heart is nerved. Cleanse your vessel, that you may receive grace more abundantly. For though remission of sins is given equally to all, the communion of the Holy Ghost is bestowed in proportion to each man's faith. If you have laboured little, you receive little; but if you have wrought much, the reward is great. You are running for yourself, see to your own interest.

If you have anything against any man, forgive it: you come here to receive forgiveness of sins, and thou also must forgive him that has sinned against you. Else with what face will you say to the Lord, Forgive me my many sins, if you have not yourself forgiven your fellow-servant even his little sins. Attend diligently the Church assemblies ; not only now when diligent attendance is required of you by the Clergy, but also after you have received the grace. For if, before you have received it, the practice is good, is it not also good after the bestowal? If before thou be grafted in, it is a safe course to be watered and tended, is it not far better after the planting? Wrestle for your own soul, especially in such days as these. Nourish your soul with sacred readings; for the Lord has prepared for you a spiritual table; therefore say thou also after the Psalmist, _The Lord is my shepherd, and I shall lack nothing: in a place of grass, there has He made me rest; He has fed me beside the waters of comfort, He has converted my soul_ :— that Angels also may share your joy, and Christ Himself the great High Priest, having accepted your resolve, may present you all to the Father, saying, _Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me_. May He keep you all well-pleasing in His sight! To whom be the glory, and the power unto the endless ages of eternity. Amen.

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