

Catechetical Lecture III

Cyril of Jerusalem

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

STROMATA 39

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INTRODUCTION

Delivered in Jerusalem around 350, these lectures were spoken to candidates preparing for Easter baptism, addressed to actual catechumens standing on the threshold of the font, not to readers at a desk. The third lecture takes up baptism itself, drawing on Romans 6 to frame the rite as burial and resurrection with Christ, and weaving the imagery of the bridal chamber, the wedding garment, and the cleansed soul through its exhortation. Cyril's catecheses became a foundational source for later mystagogical writing in both East and West, shaping how the Church would speak to its initiates for centuries. Read it as overheard instruction: pastoral, urgent, and addressed to someone about to step into water.

On Baptism.

Romans 6:3-4

Or do you not know that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Were buried therefore with Him by our baptism into death, etc.

Rejoice, you heavens, and let the earth be glad, for those who are to be sprinkled with hyssop, and cleansed with the spiritual hyssop, the power of Him to whom at His Passion drink was offered on hyssop and a reed. And while the Heavenly Powers rejoice, let the souls that are to be united to the spiritual Bridegroom make themselves ready. For _the voice_ is heard _of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord_. Isaiah 40:3 For this is no light matter, no ordinary and indiscriminate union according to the flesh, but the All-searching Spirit's election according to faith. For the inter-marriages and contracts of the world are not made altogether with judgment: but wherever there is wealth or beauty, there the bridegroom speedily approves: but here it is not beauty of person, but the soul's clear conscience; not the condemned Mammon, but the wealth of the soul in godliness.

Listen then, O you children of righteousness, to John's exhortation when he says, _Make straight the way of the Lord_. Take away all obstacles and stumbling-blocks, that you may walk straight onward to eternal life. Make ready the vessels of the soul, cleansed by unfeigned faith, for reception of the Holy Ghost. Begin at once to wash your robes in repentance, that when called to the bride-chamber you may be found clean. For the Bridegroom invites all without distinction, because His grace is bounteous; and the cry of loud-voiced heralds assembles them all: but the same Bridegroom afterwards separates those

who have come in to the figurative marriage. O may none of those whose names have now been enrolled hear the words, _Friend, how did you come in hither, not having a wedding garment_ Matthew 22:12? But may you all hear, _Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things: enter thou into the joy of your lord_ Matthew 25:12 .

For now meanwhile you stand outside the door: but God grant that you all may say, _The King has brought me into His chamber_. Song of Songs 1:4 _Let my soul rejoice in the Lord: for He has clothed me with a garment of salvation, and a robe of gladness: He has crowned me with a garland as a bridegroom_ , _and decked me with ornaments as a bride_: that the soul of every one of you may be found _not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing_ Ephesians 5:7; I do not mean before you have received the grace, for how could that be? Since it is for remission of sins that you have been called; but that, when the grace is to be given, your conscience being found uncondemned may concur with the grace.

This is in truth a serious matter, brethren, and you must approach it with good heed. Each one of you is about to be presented to God before tens of thousands of the Angelic Hosts: the Holy Ghost is about to seal your souls: you are to be enrolled in the army of the Great King. Therefore make you ready, and equip yourselves, by putting on I mean, not bright apparel , but piety of soul with a good conscience. Regard not the Laver as simple water, but rather regard the spiritual grace that is given with the water. For just as the offerings brought to the heathen altars , though simple in their nature, become defiled by the invocation of the idols , so contrariwise the simple water having received the invocation of the Holy Ghost, and of Christ, and of the Father, acquires a new power of holiness.

For since man is of twofold nature, soul and body, the purification also is twofold, the one incorporeal for the incorporeal part, and the other bodily for the body: the water cleanses the body, and the Spirit seals the soul; that we may draw near unto God, _having our heart sprinkled_ by the Spirit, _and our body washed with pure water_. Hebrews 10:22 When going down, therefore, into the water, think not of the bare element, but look for salvation by the power of the Holy Ghost: for without both you can not possibly be made perfect. It is not I that say this, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who has the power in this matter: for He says, _Unless a man be born anew_ (and He adds the words) _of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God_. John 3:3 Neither does he that is baptized with water, but not found worthy of the Spirit, receive the grace in perfection; nor if a man be virtuous in his deeds, but receive not the seal by water, shall he enter into the kingdom of heaven. A bold saying, but not mine, for it is Jesus who has declared it: and here is the proof of the statement from Holy Scripture. Cornelius was a just man, who was honoured with a vision of Angels, and had set up his prayers and almsdeeds as a good memorial before God in heaven. Peter came, and the Spirit was poured out upon them that believed, and they spoke with other tongues, and prophesied: and after the grace of the Spirit the Scripture says that Peter _commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ_ Acts 10:48; in order that, the soul having been born again by faith , the body also might by the water partake of the grace.

But if any one wishes to know why the grace is given by water and not by a different element, let him take up the Divine Scriptures and he shall learn. For water is a grand thing, and the noblest of the four visible elements of the world. Heaven is the dwelling-place of Angels, but the heavens are from

the waters : the earth is the place of men, but the earth is from the waters: and before the whole six days' formation of the things that were made, _the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water_. Genesis 1:2 The water was the beginning of the world, and Jordan the beginning of the Gospel tidings: for Israel deliverance from Pharaoh was through the sea, and for the world deliverance from sins _by the washing of water with the word_ Ephesians 5:26 of God. Where a covenant is made with any, there is water also. After the flood, a covenant was made with Noah: a covenant for Israel from Mount Sinai, but _with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop_. Hebrews 9:19 Elias is taken up, but not apart from water: for first he crosses the Jordan, then in a chariot mounts the heaven. The high-priest is first washed, then offers incense; for Aaron first washed, then was made high-priest: for how could one who had not yet been purified by water pray for the rest? Also as a symbol of Baptism there was a laver set apart within the Tabernacle.

Baptism is the end of the Old Testament, and beginning of the New. For its author was John, than whom was _none greater among them that are born of women_. The end he was of the Prophets: _for all the Prophets and the law were until John_ Matthew 11:13: but of the Gospel history he was the first-fruit. For it says, _The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, etc._: _John came baptising in the wilderness_. You may mention Elias the Tishbite who was taken up into heaven, yet he is not greater than John: Enoch was translated, but he is not greater than John: Moses was a very great lawgiver, and all the Prophets were admirable, but not greater than John. It is not I that dare to compare Prophets with Prophets: but their Master and ours, the Lord Jesus, declared it: _Among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John_ Matthew 11:11: He says not among them that are born of virgins, but _of women_. The comparison is between the great servant and his fellow-servants: but the pre-eminence and the grace of the Son is beyond comparison with servants. Do you see how great a man God chose as the first minister of this grace?— a man possessing nothing, and a lover of the desert, yet no hater of mankind: who ate locusts, and winged his soul for heaven : feeding upon honey, and speaking things both sweeter and more salutary than honey: clothed with a garment of camel's hair, and showing in himself the pattern of the ascetic life; who also was sanctified by the Holy Ghost while yet he was carried in his mother's womb. Jeremiah was sanctified, but did not prophesy, in the womb Jeremiah 1:5: John alone while carried in the womb leaped for joy Luke 1:44, and though he saw not with the eyes of flesh, knew his Master by the Spirit: for since the grace of Baptism was great, it required greatness in its founder also.

This man was baptizing in Jordan, and _there went out unto him all Jerusalem_ Matthew 3:5, to enjoy the first-fruits of baptisms: for in Jerusalem is the prerogative of all things good. But learn, O you inhabitants of Jerusalem, how they that came out were baptized by him: _confessing their sins_, it is said. Matthew 3:6 First they showed their wounds, then he applied the remedies, and to them that believed gave redemption from eternal fire. And if you will be convinced of this very point, that the baptism of John is a redemption from the threat of the fire, hear how he says, _O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come_ _? Be not then henceforth a viper, but as you have been formerly a viper's brood, put off, says he, the slough_ _of your former sinful life. For every serpent creeps into a hole and casts its old slough, and having rubbed off the old skin, grows young again in body. In like manner enter thou also through the strait and narrow gate_ Matthew 7:13-14: rub

off your former self by fasting, and drive out that which is destroying you. _Put off the old man with his doings_ Colossians 3:9, and quote that saying in the Canticles, _I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on_ ?

But there is perhaps among you some hypocrite, a man-pleaser, and one who makes a pretence of piety, but believes not from the heart; having the hypocrisy of Simon Magus; one who has come hither not in order to receive of the grace, but to spy out what is given: let him also learn from John: _And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees, Every tree therefore that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire_. Matthew 3:10 The Judge is inexorable; put away your hypocrisy.

What then must you do? And what are the fruits of repentance? _Let him that has two coats give to him that has none_ Luke 3:11: the teacher was worthy of credit, since he was also the first to practise what he taught: he was not ashamed to speak, for conscience hindered not his tongue: _and he that has meat, let him do likewise_. Would you enjoy the grace of the Holy Spirit, yet judge the poor not worthy of bodily food? Do you seek the great gifts, and impart not of the small? Though you be a publican, or a fornicator, have hope of salvation: _the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you_. Matthew 21:31 Paul also is witness, saying, _Neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor_ the rest, _shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but you were washed, but you were sanctified_. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 He said not, _such are some of you_, but _such were some of you_. Sin committed in the state of ignorance is pardoned, but persistent wickedness is condemned.

You have as the glory of Baptism the Son Himself, the Only-begotten of God. For why should I speak any more of man? John was great, but what is he to the Lord? His was a loud-sounding voice, but what in comparison with the Word? Very noble was the herald, but what in comparison with the King? Noble was he that baptized with water, but what to Him that baptizes _with the Holy Ghost and with fire_ Matthew 3:11? The Saviour baptized the Apostles with the Holy Ghost and with fire, when _suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire: and it sat upon each one of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost_ Acts 2:2 .

If any man receive not Baptism, he has not salvation; except only Martyrs, who even without the water receive the kingdom. For when the Saviour, in redeeming the world by His Cross, was pierced in the side, He shed forth blood and water; that men, living in times of peace, might be baptized in water, and, in times of persecution, in their own blood. For martyrdom also the Saviour is wont to call a baptism, saying, _Can you drink the cup which I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with_ Mark 10:38? And the Martyrs confess, by _being made a spectacle unto the world, and to Angels, and to men_ 1 Corinthians 4:9; and you will soon confess:— but it is not yet the time for you to hear of this.

Jesus sanctified Baptism by being Himself baptized. If the Son of God was baptized, what godly man is he that despises Baptism? But He was baptized not that He might receive remission of sins, for He was sinless; but being sinless, He was baptized, that He might give to them that are baptized a divine and excellent grace. For _since the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise partook of the same_ Hebrews 2:14, that having been made partakers of His presence in the flesh we might be made partakers also of His Divine grace: thus Jesus was baptized, that thereby we again by our participation might receive both salvation and honour. According to Job, there was in the waters the dragon that _draws up Jordan into his mouth_. Job 40:18 Since, therefore, it was necessary to break the heads of the dragon in pieces , He went down and bound the strong one in the waters, that we might receive power to _tread upon serpents and scorpions_. Luke 10:19 The beast was great and terrible. _No fishing-vessel was able to carry one scale of his tail_ : destruction ran before him , ravaging all that met him. The Life encountered him, that the mouth of Death might henceforth be stopped, and all we that are saved might say, _O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory_ 1 Corinthians 15:55? The sting of death is drawn by Baptism.

For you go down into the water, bearing your sins, but the invocation of grace , having sealed your soul, suffers you not afterwards to be swallowed up by the terrible dragon. Having gone down dead in sins, you come up quickened in righteousness. For if you have been _united with the likeness of the Saviour's death_ Romans 6:5, you shall also be deemed worthy of His Resurrection. For as Jesus took upon Him the sins of the world, and died, that by putting sin to death He might rise again in righteousness; so thou by going down into the water, and being in a manner buried in the waters, as He was in the rock, art raised again _walking in newness of life_.

Moreover, when you have been deemed worthy of the grace, He then gives you strength to wrestle against the adverse powers. For as after His Baptism He was tempted forty days (not that He was unable

to gain the victory before, but because He wished to do all things in due order and succession), so thou likewise, though not daring before your baptism to wrestle with the adversaries, yet after you have received the grace and art henceforth confident in the armour of righteousness 2 Corinthians 6:7, must then do battle, and preach the Gospel, if you will.

Jesus Christ was the Son of God, yet He preached not the Gospel before His Baptism. If the Master Himself followed the right time in due order, ought we, His servants, to venture out of order? From that time Jesus began to preach Matthew 4:17, when the Holy Spirit had descended upon Him in a bodily shape, like a dove Luke 3:22; not that Jesus might see Him first, for He knew Him even before He came in a bodily shape, but that John, who was baptizing Him, might behold Him. For I, says he, knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, He said to me, Upon whomsoever you shall see the Spirit descending and abiding on Him, that is He. John 1:33 If you too hast unfeigned piety, the Holy Ghost comes down on you also, and a Father's voice sounds over you from on high — not, This is My Son, but, This has now been made My son; for the is belongs to Him alone, because In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. To Him belongs the is, since He is always the Son of God: but to you has now been made: since you have not the sonship by nature, but receive it by adoption. He eternally is; but you receive the grace by advancement.

Make ready then the vessel of your soul, that you may become a son of God, and an heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ Romans 8:17; if, indeed, you are preparing yourself that you may receive; if you are drawing near in faith that you may be made faithful; if of set purpose you are putting off the old man. For all things whatsoever you have done shall be forgiven you, whether it be fornication, or adultery, or any other such form of licentiousness. What can be a greater sin than to crucify Christ? Yet even of this Baptism can purify. For so spoke Peter to the three thousand who came to him, to those who had crucified the Lord, when they asked him, saying, Men and brethren, what shall we do Acts 2:37? For the wound is great. You have made us think of our fall, O Peter, by saying, You killed the Prince of Life. What salve is there for so great a wound? What cleansing for such foulness? What is the salvation for such perdition? Repent, says he, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. O unspeakable loving-kindness of God! They have no hope of being saved, and yet they are thought worthy of the Holy Ghost. You see the power of Baptism! If any of you has crucified the Christ by blasphemous words; if any of you in ignorance has denied Him before men; if any by wicked works has caused the doctrine to be blasphemed; let him repent and be of good hope, for the same grace is present even now.

Be of good courage, O Jerusalem; the Lord will take away all your iniquities. The Lord will wash away the filth of His sons and of His daughters by the Spirit of judgment, and by the Spirit of burning Isaiah 4:4. He will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be cleansed from all your sin. Ezekiel 36:25 Angels shall dance around you, and say, Who is this that comes up in white array, leaning upon her beloved? For the soul that was formerly a slave has now adopted her Master Himself as her kinsman: and He accepting the unfeigned purpose will answer: Behold, you are fair, my love; behold, you are fair: your teeth are like flocks of sheep new shorn, (because of the confession of a good conscience: and further) which have all of them twins; because of the twofold grace, I mean

that which is perfected of water and of the Spirit , or that which is announced by the Old and by the New Testament. And God grant that all of you when you have finished the course of the fast, may remember what I say, and bringing forth fruit in good works, may stand blameless beside the Spiritual Bridegroom, and obtain the remission of your sins from God; to whom with the Son and Holy Spirit be the glory forever. Amen.

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