

Catechetical Lecture V

Cyril of Jerusalem

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

STROMATA 41

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INTRODUCTION

Delivered in Jerusalem around 350 to candidates preparing for baptism at Easter, this is the fifth in a series of instructions Cyril gave at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, addresses that became a foundational document for how the early Church taught the faith to converts. The lecture treats faith in two registers: first as the ordinary human trust that underwrites marriage, farming, and seafaring, and then as the saving assent that distinguishes the baptized. Cyril writes with the directness of a bishop speaking to people he knows by name, and the catechetical genre he helped shape would echo through Ambrose, Augustine, and the entire later tradition of mystagogical preaching. Read it slowly, as the spoken instruction it was, closer to a pastor's address than a treatise.

Of Faith.

Hebrews 11:1, 2

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report.

How great a dignity the Lord bestows on you in transferring you from the order of Catechumens to that of the Faithful, the Apostle Paul shows, when he affirms, *“God is faithful, by Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ.”* 1 Corinthians 1:9 For since God is called Faithful, thou also in receiving this title receive a great dignity. For as God is called Good, and Just, and Almighty, and Maker of the Universe, so is He also called Faithful. Consider therefore to what a dignity you are rising, seeing you are to become partaker of a title of God.

Here then it is further required, that each of you be found faithful in his conscience: *“for a faithful man it is hard to find.”* Proverbs 20:6: not that you should show your conscience to me, for you are not to *“be judged of man's judgment”*; but that thou show the sincerity of your faith to God, *“who tries the reins and hearts”*, and *“knows the thoughts of men”*. A great thing is a faithful man, being richest of all rich men. For *“to the faithful man belongs the whole world of wealth”*, in that he disdains and tramples on it. For they who in appearance are rich, and have many possessions, are poor in soul: since the more they gather, the more they pine with longing for what is still lacking. But the faithful man,

most strange paradox, in poverty is rich: for knowing that we need only to have _food and raiment_, and being _therewith content_ 1 Timothy 6:8, he has trodden riches under foot.

Nor is it only among us, who bear the name of Christ, that the dignity of faith is great : but likewise all things that are accomplished in the world, even by those who are aliens from the Church, are accomplished by faith.

By faith the laws of marriage yoke together those who have lived as strangers: and because of the faith in marriage contracts a stranger is made partner of a stranger's person and possessions. By faith husbandry also is sustained, for he who believes not that he shall receive a harvest endures not the toils. By faith sea-faring men, trusting to the thinnest plank, exchange that most solid element, the land, for the restless motion of the waves, committing themselves to uncertain hopes, and carrying with them a faith more sure than any anchor. By faith therefore most of men's affairs are held together: and not among us only has there been this belief, but also, as I have said, among those who are without. For if they receive not the Scriptures, but bring forward certain doctrines of their own, even these they accept by faith.

The lesson also which was read today invites you to the true faith, by setting before you the way in which you also must please God: for it affirms that _without faith it is impossible to please Him_. Hebrews 11:6 For when will a man resolve to serve God, unless he believes that _He is a giver of reward?_ When will a young woman choose a virgin life, or a young man live soberly, if they believe not that for chastity there is _a crown that fades not away_ 1 Peter 5:4? Faith is an eye that enlightens every conscience, and imparts understanding; for the Prophet says, _And if you believe not, you shall not understand_.

Faith _stops the mouths of lions_ Hebrews 11:34, as in Daniel's case: for the Scripture says concerning him, that _Daniel was brought up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God_. Daniel 6:23 Is there anything more fearful than the devil? Yet even against him we have no other shield than faith , an impalpable buckler against an unseen foe. For he sends forth various arrows, and _shoots down in the dark night_ those that watch not; but, since the enemy is unseen, we have faith as our strong armour, according to the saying of the Apostle, _In all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one_. Ephesians 6:16 A fiery dart of desire of base indulgence is often cast forth from the devil: but faith, suggesting a picture of the judgment, cools down the mind, and quenches the dart.

There is much to tell of faith, and the whole day would not be time sufficient for us to describe it fully. At present let us be content with Abraham only, as one of the examples from the Old Testament, seeing that we have been made his sons through faith. He was justified not only by works, but also by faith : for though he did many things well, yet he was never called the friend of God , except when he believed. Moreover, his every work was performed in faith. Through faith he left his parents; left country, and place, and home through faith. Hebrews 11:8-10 In like manner, therefore, as he was justified be thou justified also. In his body he was already dead in regard to offspring, and Sarah his wife was now old, and there was no hope left of having children. God promises the old man a child, and Abraham _without being weakened in faith, though he considered his own body now as good as dead_ Romans 4:19,

heeded not the weakness of his body, but the power of Him who promised, because _he counted Him faithful who had promised_ Hebrews 11:11-12, and so beyond all expectation gained the child from bodies as it were already dead. And when, after he had gained his son, he was commanded to offer him up, although he had heard the word, _In Isaac shall your seed be called_ , he proceeded to offer up his son, his only son, to God, believing _that God is able to raise up even from the dead_. Hebrews 11:19 And having bound his son, and laid him on the wood, he did in purpose offer him, but by the goodness of God in delivering to him a lamb instead of his child, he received his son alive. Being faithful in these things, he was sealed for righteousness, _and received circumcision as a seal of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision_ Romans 4:11, having received a promise _that he should be the father of many nations_ Genesis 17:5 .

Let us see, then, how Abraham is the father of many nations. Romans 4:17-18 Of Jews he is confessedly the father, through succession according to the flesh. But if we hold to the succession according to the flesh, we shall be compelled to say that the oracle was false. For according to the flesh he is no longer father of us all: but the example of his faith makes us all sons of Abraham. How? And in what manner? With men it is incredible that one should rise from the dead; as in like manner it is incredible also that there should be offspring from aged persons as good as dead. But when Christ is preached as having been crucified on the tree, and as having died and risen again, we believe it. By the likeness therefore of our faith we are adopted into the sonship of Abraham. And then, following upon our faith, we receive like him the spiritual seal, being circumcised by the Holy Spirit through Baptism, not in the foreskin of the body, but in the heart, according to Jeremiah, saying, _And you shall be circumcised unto God in the foreskin of your heart_ : and according to the Apostle, _in the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism_, and the rest Colossians 2:11-12 .

This faith if we keep we shall be free from condemnation, and shall be adorned with all kinds of virtues. For so great is the strength of faith, as even to buoy men up in walking on the sea. Peter was a man like ourselves, made up of flesh and blood, and living upon like food. But when Jesus said, _Come_ Matthew 14:29, he believed, and walked upon the waters, and found his faith safer upon the waters than any ground; and his heavy body was upheld by the buoyancy of his faith. But though he had safe footing over the water as long as he believed, yet when he doubted, at once he began to sink: for as his faith gradually relaxed, his body also was drawn down with it. And when He saw his distress, Jesus who remedies the distresses of our souls, said, _O thou of little faith, wherefore did you doubt_ Mark 14:31? And being nerved again by Him who grasped his right hand, he had no sooner recovered his faith, than, led by the hand of the Master, he resumed the same walking upon the waters: for this the Gospel indirectly mentioned, saying, _when they had gone up into the ship_. For it says not that Peter swam across and went up, but gives us to understand that, after returning the same distance that he went to meet Jesus, he went up again into the ship.

Yea, so much power has faith, that not the believer only is saved, but some have been saved by others believing. The paralytic in Capernaum was not a believer, but they believed who brought him, and let him down through the tiles Mark 2:4: for the sick man's soul shared the sickness of his body. And think not that I accuse him without cause: the Gospel itself says, _when Jesus saw_, not his faith, but _their

faith_, He says to the sick of the palsy, Arise! The bearers believed, and the sick of the palsy enjoyed the blessing of the cure.

Would you see yet more surely that some are saved by others' faith? Lazarus died John 11:14-44: one day had passed, and a second, and a third: his sinews were decayed, and corruption was preying already upon his body. How could one four days dead believe, and entreat the Redeemer on his own behalf? But what the dead man lacked was supplied by his true sisters. For when the Lord had come, the sister fell down before Him, and when He said, _Where have you laid him?_ and she had made answer, _Lord, by this time he stinks; for he has been four days dead_, the Lord said, _If you believe, you shall see the glory of God_; as much as saying, Supply thou the dead man's lack of faith: and the sisters' faith had so much power, that it recalled the dead from the gates of hell. Have then men by believing, the one on behalf of the other, been able to raise the dead, and shall not thou, if you believe sincerely on your own behalf, be much rather profited? Nay, even if you be faithless, or of little faith, the Lord is loving unto man; He condescends to you on your repentance: only on your part say with honest mind, _Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief_. Mark 9:24 But if you think that thou really art faithful, but hast not yet the fullness of faith, thou too hast need to say like the Apostles, _Lord, increase our faith_ Luke 17:5: for some part you have of yourself, but the greater part you receive from Him.

For the name of Faith is in the form of speech one, but has two distinct senses. For there is one kind of faith, the dogmatic, involving an assent of the soul on some particular point: and it is profitable to the soul, as the Lord says: _He that hears My words, and believes Him that sent Me, has everlasting life, and comes not into judgment_ John 5:24: and again, _He that believes in the Son is not judged, but has passed from death unto life_. Oh the great loving-kindness of God! For the righteous were many years in pleasing Him: but what they succeeded in gaining by many years of well-pleasing, this Jesus now bestows on you in a single hour. For if you shall believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved, and shall be transported into Paradise by Him who brought in there the robber. And doubt not whether it is possible; for He who on this sacred Golgotha saved the robber after one single hour of belief, the same shall save you also on your believing.

But there is a second kind of faith, which is bestowed by Christ as a gift of grace. _For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit: to another faith, by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing_. 1 Corinthians 12:8-9 This faith then which is given of grace from the Spirit is not merely doctrinal, but also works things above man's power. For whosoever has this faith, _shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove_. Mark 11:23 For whenever any one shall say this in faith, _believing that it comes to pass, and shall not doubt in his heart, then receives he the grace_.

And of this faith it is said, _If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed_. Matthew 17:20 For just as the grain of mustard seed is small in size, but fiery in its operation, and though sown in a small space has a circle of great branches, and when grown up is able even to shelter the fowls Matthew 13:32; so, likewise, faith in the swiftest moment works the greatest effects in the soul. For, when enlightened by faith, the soul has visions of God, and as far as is possible beholds God, and ranges round the bounds of the universe, and before the end of this world already beholds the Judgment, and the payment of the promised rewards. Have thou therefore that faith in Him which comes from your own self, that you may also receive from Him that faith which works things above man.

But in learning the Faith and in professing it, acquire and keep that only, which is now delivered to you by the Church, and which has been built up strongly out of all the Scriptures. For since all cannot read the Scriptures, some being hindered as to the knowledge of them by want of learning, and others by a want of leisure, in order that the soul may not perish from ignorance, we comprise the whole doctrine of the Faith in a few lines. This summary I wish you both to commit to memory when I recite it, and to rehearse it with all diligence among yourselves, not writing it out on paper, but engraving it by the memory upon your heart, taking care while you rehearse it that no Catechumen chance to overhear the things which have been delivered to you. I wish you also to keep this as a provision through the whole course of your life, and beside this to receive no other, neither if we ourselves should change and contradict our present teaching, nor if an adverse angel, _transformed into an angel of light_ 2 Corinthians 11:14 should wish to lead you astray. _For though we or an angel from heaven preach to you any other gospel than that you have received, let him be to you anathema_. Galatians 1:8-9 So for the present listen while I simply say the Creed, and commit it to memory; but at the proper season expect the confirmation out of Holy Scripture of each part of the contents. For the articles of the Faith were not composed as seemed good to men; but the most important points collected out of all the Scripture

make up one complete teaching of the Faith. And just as the mustard seed in one small grain contains many branches, so also this Faith has embraced in few words all the knowledge of godliness in the Old and New Testaments. Take heed then, brethren, and _hold fast the traditions_ which you now receive, and _write them on the table of your heart_.

Guard them with reverence, lest per chance the enemy despoil any who have grown slack; or lest some heretic pervert any of the truths delivered to you. For faith is like putting money into the bank , even as we have now done; but from you God requires the accounts of the deposit. _I charge you_, as the Apostle says, _before God, who quickens all things, and Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession, that you keep_ this faith which is committed to you, _without spot, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ_. A treasure of life has now been committed to you, and the Master demands the deposit at His appearing, _which in His own times He shall show, Who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only has immortality, dwelling in light which no man can approach unto; Whom no man has seen nor can see. To Whom be glory, honour, and power_ 1 Timothy 6:15-16 for ever and ever. Amen.

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