

Catechetical Lecture XIX : Mystagogic Catechesis I

Cyril of Jerusalem

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

STROMATA 55

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INTRODUCTION

Delivered in Jerusalem around 350, these lectures were addressed to the newly baptized during Easter week, walking them through rites they had just undergone but never before seen explained. The first of five Mystagogic Catecheses takes up the renunciation of Satan and the turning toward Christ that opened the baptismal liturgy, reading the rite through the lens of Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea. Cyril's discourses are among the earliest surviving witnesses to the shape of fourth-century initiation, and they stand at the head of the mystagogical tradition later developed by Ambrose, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and John Chrysostom. Expect close, image-laden exposition meant to deepen what the hearers have already tasted, instruction, not argument.

First Lecture on the Mysteries.

With a Lesson from the First General Epistle of Peter, beginning at *“Be sober, be vigilant,”* to the end of the Epistle.

I have long been wishing, O true-born and dearly beloved children of the Church, to discourse to you concerning these spiritual and heavenly Mysteries; but since I well knew that seeing is far more persuasive than hearing, I waited for the present season; that finding you more open to the influence of my words from your present experience, I might lead you by the hand into the brighter and more fragrant meadow of the Paradise before us; especially as you have been made fit to receive the more sacred Mysteries, after having been found worthy of divine and life-giving Baptism. Since therefore it remains to set before you a table of the more perfect instructions, let us now teach you these things exactly, that you may know the effect wrought upon you on that evening of your baptism.

First ye entered into the vestibule of the Baptistery, and there facing towards the West ye listened to the command to stretch forth your hand, and as in the presence of Satan ye renounced him. Now ye must know that this figure is found in ancient history. For when Pharaoh, that most bitter and cruel tyrant, was oppressing the free and high-born people of the Hebrews, God sent Moses to bring them out of the evil bondage of the Egyptians. Then the door posts were anointed with the blood of a lamb, that the destroyer might flee from the houses which had the sign of the blood; and the Hebrew people was

marvellously delivered. The enemy, however, after their rescue, pursued after them Exodus 14:9, 23, and saw the sea wondrously parted for them; nevertheless he went on, following close in their footsteps, and was all at once overwhelmed and engulfed in the Red Sea.

Now turn from the old to the new, from the figure to the reality. There we have Moses sent from God to Egypt; here, Christ, sent forth from His Father into the world: there, that Moses might lead forth an afflicted people out of Egypt; here, that Christ might rescue those who are oppressed in the world under sin: there, the blood of a lamb was the spell against the destroyer; here, the blood of the Lamb without blemish Jesus Christ is made the charm to scare evil spirits: there, the tyrant was pursuing that ancient people even to the sea; and here the daring and shameless spirit, the author of evil, was following you even to the very streams of salvation. The tyrant of old was drowned in the sea; and this present one disappears in the water of salvation.

But nevertheless you are bidden to say, with arm outstretched towards him as though he were present, I renounce you, Satan. I wish also to say wherefore ye stand facing to the West; for it is necessary. Since the West is the region of sensible darkness, and he being darkness has his dominion also in darkness, therefore, looking with a symbolic meaning towards the West, you renounce that dark and gloomy potentate. What then did each of you stand up and say? I renounce you, Satan,— you wicked and most cruel tyrant! Meaning, I fear your might no longer; for that Christ has overthrown, having partaken with me of flesh and blood, that through these He might by death destroy death Hebrews 2:14-15, that I might not be made subject to bondage forever. I renounce you,— you crafty and most subtle serpent. I renounce you,— plotter as you are, who under the guise of friendship contrived all disobedience, and work apostasy in our first parents. I renounce you, Satan,— the artificer and abettor of all wickedness.

Then in a second sentence you are taught to say, and all your works. Now the works of Satan are all sin, which also you must renounce — just as one who has escaped a tyrant has surely escaped his weapons also. All sin therefore, of every kind, is included in the works of the devil. Only know this; that all that you say, especially at that most thrilling hour, is written in God's books; when therefore you do anything contrary to these promises, you shall be judged as a transgressor. Galatians 2:18 You renounce therefore the works of Satan; I mean, all deeds and thoughts which are contrary to reason.

Then you say, And all his pomp. Now the pomp of the devil is the madness of theatres, and horse-races, and hunting, and all such vanity: from which that holy man praying to be delivered says unto God, Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity. Be not interested in the madness of the theatre, where you will behold the wanton gestures of the players, carried on with mockeries and all unseemliness, and the frantic dancing of effeminate men — nor in the madness of them who in hunts expose themselves to wild beasts, that they may pamper their miserable appetite; who, to serve their belly with meats, become themselves in reality meat for the belly of untamed beasts; and to speak justly, for the sake of their own god, their belly, they cast away their life headlong in single combats. Shun also horse-races, that frantic and soul-subverting spectacle. For all these are the pomp of the devil.

Moreover, the things which are hung up at idol festivals, either meat or bread, or other such things polluted by the invocation of the unclean spirits, are reckoned in the pomp of the devil. For as the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist before the invocation of the Holy and Adorable Trinity were simple

bread and wine, while after the invocation the Bread becomes the Body of Christ, and the Wine the Blood of Christ , so in like manner such meats belonging to the pomp of Satan, though in their own nature simple, become profane by the invocation of the evil spirit.

After this you say, and all your service. Now the service of the devil is prayer in idol temples; things done in honour of lifeless idols; the lighting of lamps , or burning of incense by fountains or rivers , as some persons cheated by dreams or by evil spirits do \[resort to this \], thinking to find a cure even for their bodily ailments. Go not after such things. The watching of birds, divination, omens, or amulets, or charms written on leaves, sorceries, or other evil arts , and all such things, are services of the devil; therefore shun them. For if after renouncing Satan and associating yourself with Christ , thou fall under their influence, you shall find the tyrant more bitter; perchance, because he treated you of old as his own, and relieved you from his hard bondage, but has now been greatly exasperated by you; so you will be bereaved of Christ, and have experience of the other. Have you not heard the old history which tells us of Lot and his daughters? Was not he himself saved with his daughters, when he had gained the mountain, while his wife became a pillar of salt, set up as a monument for ever, in remembrance of her depraved will and her turning back. Take heed therefore to yourself, and turn not again to _what is behind_ , having put your hand to the plough, and then turning back to the salt savour of this life's doings; but escape to the mountain, to Jesus Christ, that _stone hewn without hands_ Daniel 2:35, 45, which has filled the world.

When therefore you renounce Satan, utterly breaking all your covenant with him, that ancient _league with hell_ Isaiah 28:15, there is opened to you the paradise of God, which He planted towards the East, whence for his transgression our first father was banished; and a symbol of this was your turning from West to East, the place of light. Then you were told to say, I believe in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost, and in one Baptism of repentance. Of which things we spoke to you at length in the former Lectures, as God's grace allowed us.

Guarded therefore by these discourses, _be sober_. _For_ our _adversary the devil_, as was just now read, _as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour_. 1 Peter 5:9 But though in former times death was mighty and devoured, at the holy Laver of regeneration God has _wiped away every tear from off all faces_. For you shall no more mourn, now that you have put off the old man; but you shall keep holy-day , _clothed in the garment of salvation_ Isaiah 61:10, even Jesus Christ.

And these things were done in the outer chamber. But if God will, when in the succeeding lectures on the Mysteries we have entered into the Holy of Holies , we shall there know the symbolic meaning of the things which are there performed. Now to God the Father, with the Son and the Holy Ghost, be glory, and power, and majesty, forever and ever. Amen.

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