

Catechetical Lecture XXI : Mystagogic Catechesis III

Cyril of Jerusalem

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

STROMATA 57

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INTRODUCTION

Delivered to the newly baptized in fourth-century Jerusalem during the week following their Easter initiation, this lecture belongs to a series in which Cyril, as bishop, finally unveiled the meaning of rites his hearers had just undergone but had been forbidden to learn about beforehand. The Mystagogic Catecheses are among the earliest surviving expositions of Christian sacramental theology, and they shaped how the Eastern church would speak of chrismation as a distinct gift of the Spirit for centuries afterward. Here Cyril works outward from a single act — the anointing with myron, to argue that the baptized have been made, in a real sense, "Christs." Expect the cadence of a bishop addressing his own congregation directly, drawing typological connections at speed and expecting his hearers to follow.

(On the Mysteries. III.)

On Chrism.

1 John 2:20-28

But you have an unction from the Holy One, etc.....that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

Having been _baptized into Christ_, and _put on Christ Galatians 3:27_ , you have been made conformable to the Son of God; for God having _foreordained us unto adoption as sons Ephesians 1:5_ , made us _to be conformed to the body of Christ's glory_. Philippians 3:21 Having therefore become _partakers of Christ_ Hebrews 3:14, you are properly called Christs, and of you God said, _Touch not My Christs_ , or anointed. Now you have been made Christs, by receiving the antitype of the Holy Ghost; and all things have been wrought in you by imitation , because you are images of Christ. He washed in the river Jordan, and having imparted of the fragrance of His Godhead to the waters, He came up from them; and the Holy Ghost in the fullness of His being lighted on Him, like resting upon like. And to you in like manner, after you had come up from the pool of the sacred streams, there was given an Unction , the anti-type of that wherewith Christ was anointed; and this is the Holy Ghost; of whom also the blessed Esaias, in his prophecy respecting Him, said in the person of the Lord, _The

Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me: He has sent Me to preach glad tidings to the poor_ Isaiah 61:1 .

For Christ was not anointed by men with oil or material ointment, but the Father having before appointed Him to be the Saviour of the whole world, anointed Him with the Holy Ghost, as Peter says, _Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Ghost_. Acts 10:38 David also the Prophet cried, saying, _Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your kingdom; You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God even Your God has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows_. And as Christ was in reality crucified, and buried, and raised, and you are in Baptism accounted worthy of being crucified, buried, and raised together with Him in a likeness, so is it with the unction also. As He was anointed with an ideal oil of gladness, that is, with the Holy Ghost, called oil of gladness, because He is the author of spiritual gladness, so you were anointed with ointment, having been made partakers and _fellows of Christ_.

But beware of supposing this to be plain ointment. For as the Bread of the Eucharist, after the invocation of the Holy Ghost, is mere bread no longer , but the Body of Christ, so also this holy ointment is no more simple ointment, nor (so to say) common, after invocation, but it is Christ's gift of grace, and, by the advent of the Holy Ghost, is made fit to impart His Divine Nature. Which ointment is symbolically applied to your forehead and your other senses ; and while your body is anointed with the visible ointment, your soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit.

And you were first anointed on the forehead, that you might be delivered from the shame, which the first man who transgressed bore about with him everywhere; and that _with unveiled face ye might reflect as a mirror the glory of the Lord_. 2 Corinthians 3:18 Then on your ears; that you might receive the ears which are quick to hear the Divine Mysteries, of which Esaias said, _The Lord gave me also an ear to hear_ Isaiah 50:4; and the Lord Jesus in the Gospel, _He that has ears to hear let him hear_. Matthew 11:15 Then on the nostrils; that receiving the sacred ointment ye may say, _We are to God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved_. 2 Corinthians 2:15 Afterwards on your breast; that having put on the _breast-plate of righteousness_, you may _stand against the wiles of the devil_. For as Christ after His Baptism, and the visitation of the Holy Ghost, went forth and vanquished the adversary, so likewise ye, after Holy Baptism and the Mystical Chrism, having put on the whole armour of the Holy Ghost, are to stand against the power of the adversary, and vanquish it, saying, _I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me_ Philippians 4:13 .

Having been counted worthy of this Holy Chrism, you are called Christians, verifying the name also by your new birth. For before you were deemed worthy of this grace, you had properly no right to this title, but were advancing on your way towards being Christians.

Moreover, you should know that in the old Scripture there lies the symbol of this Chrism. For what time Moses imparted to his brother the command of God, and made him High-priest, after bathing in water, he anointed him; and Aaron was called Christ or Anointed, evidently from the typical Chrism. So also the High-priest, in advancing Solomon to the kingdom, anointed him after he had bathed in Gihon. 1 Kings 1:39 To them however these things happened in a figure, but to you not in a figure, but in truth; because you were truly anointed by the Holy Ghost. Christ is the beginning of your salvation; for He

is truly the First-fruit, and you the mass Romans 11:16; but if the First-fruit be holy, it is manifest that Its holiness will pass to the mass also.

Keep This unspotted: for it shall teach you all things, if it abide in you, as you have just heard declared by the blessed John, discoursing much concerning this Unction. For this holy thing is a spiritual safeguard of the body, and salvation of the soul. Of this the blessed Esaias prophesying of old time said, _And on this mountain_, — (now he calls the Church a mountain elsewhere also, as when he says, _In the last days the mountain of the Lord's house shall be manifest_ Isaiah 2:2;)— _on this mountain shall the Lord make unto all nations a feast; they shall drink wine, they shall drink gladness, they shall anoint themselves with ointment_. And that he may make you sure, hear what he says of this ointment as being mystical; _Deliver all these things to the nations, for the counsel of the Lord is unto all nations_. Having been anointed, therefore, with this holy ointment, keep it unspotted and unblemished in you, pressing forward by good works, and being made well-pleasing to the Captain of your salvation, Christ Jesus, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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