

Catechetical Lecture XXII : Mystagogic Catechesis IV

Cyril of Jerusalem

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

STROMATA 58

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INTRODUCTION

Delivered in Jerusalem around 350 to the newly baptized during Easter week, this lecture belongs to a series given on consecutive days as the catechumens were finally permitted to learn the meaning of the rites they had just undergone. Cyril walks them through the Eucharist with the freshness of a bishop instructing converts who have, the previous night, tasted the bread and cup for the first time, and his insistence that the elements are no longer "bare" became foundational for later Eastern and Western sacramental theology alike. The mystagogical catechesis as a genre largely begins here, alongside parallel works by Ambrose and the Theodore of Mopsuestia. Expect plainspoken pastoral instruction rather than disputation: a bishop showing his flock what they have received.

(On the Mysteries. IV.)

On the Body and Blood of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:23

I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, how that the Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread, etc.

Even of itself the teaching of the Blessed Paul is sufficient to give you a full assurance concerning those Divine Mysteries, of which having been deemed worthy, you have become of _the same body_ and blood with Christ. For you have just heard him say distinctly, _That our Lord Jesus Christ in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks He broke it, and gave to His disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is My Body: and having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, Take, drink, this is My Blood_. Since then He Himself declared and said of the Bread, _This is My Body_, who shall dare to doubt any longer? And since He has Himself affirmed and said, _This is My Blood_, who shall ever hesitate, saying, that it is not His blood?

He once in Cana of Galilee, turned the water into wine, akin to blood, and is it incredible that He should have turned wine into blood? When called to a bodily marriage, He miraculously wrought that

wonderful work; and _on the children of the bride-chamber_ Matthew 9:15, shall He not much rather be acknowledged to have bestowed the fruition of His Body and Blood ?

Wherefore with full assurance let us partake as of the Body and Blood of Christ: for in the figure of Bread is given to you His Body, and in the figure of Wine His Blood; that you by partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, may be made of the same body and the same blood with Him. For thus we come to bear Christ in us, because His Body and Blood are distributed through our members; thus it is that, according to the blessed Peter, _we become partakers of the divine nature_ 2 Peter 1:4 .

Christ on a certain occasion discoursing with the Jews said, _Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood, you have no life in you_. John 6:53 They not having heard His saying in a spiritual sense were offended, and went back, supposing that He was inviting them to eat flesh.

In the Old Testament also there was show-bread; but this, as it belonged to the Old Testament, has come to an end; but in the New Testament there is Bread of heaven, and a Cup of salvation, sanctifying soul and body; for as the Bread corresponds to our body, so is the Word appropriate to our soul.

Consider therefore the Bread and the Wine not as bare elements, for they are, according to the Lord's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ; for even though sense suggests this to you, yet let faith establish you. Judge not the matter from the taste, but from faith be fully assured without misgiving, that the Body and Blood of Christ have been vouchsafed to you.

Also the blessed David shall advise you the meaning of this, saying, _You have prepared a table before me in the presence of them that afflict me_. What he says, is to this effect: Before Your coming, the evil spirits prepared a table for men , polluted and defiled and full of devilish influence ; but since Your coming. O Lord, _You have prepared a table before me_. When the man says to God, _You have prepared before me a table_, what other does he indicate but that mystical and spiritual Table, which God has prepared for us _over against_, that is, contrary and in opposition to the evil spirits? And very truly; for that had communion with devils, but this, with God. _You have anointed my head with oil_. With oil He anointed your head upon your forehead, for the seal which you have of God; that you may be made _the engraving of the signet, Holiness unto God_. And _your cup intoxicates me, as very strong_. You see that cup here spoken of, which Jesus took in His hands, and gave thanks, and said, _This is My blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins_ Matthew 26:28 .

Therefore Solomon also, hinting at this grace, says in Ecclesiastes, _Come hither, eat your bread with joy_ (that is, the spiritual bread; _Come hither_, he calls with the call to salvation and blessing), _and drink your wine with a merry heart_ (that is, the spiritual wine); _and let oil be poured out upon your head_ you see he alludes even to the mystic Chrism); _and let your garments be always white, for the Lord is well pleased with your works_ Ecclesiastes 9:7-8; for before you came to Baptism, your works were _vanity of vanities_. But now, having put off your old garments, and put on those which are spiritually white, you must be continually robed in white: of course we mean not this, that you are always to wear white raiment; but you must be clad in the garments that are truly white and shining and spiritual, that you may say with the blessed Esaias, _My soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with a garment of salvation, and put a robe of gladness around me_ Isaiah 61:10 .

Having learned these things, and been fully assured that the seeming bread is not bread, though sensible to taste, but the Body of Christ; and that the seeming wine is not wine, though the taste will have it so, but the Blood of Christ ; and that of this David sung of old, saying, _And bread strengthens man's heart, to make his face to shine with oil_ , strengthen your heart, by partaking thereof as spiritual, and make the face of your soul to shine. And so having it unveiled with a pure conscience, may you _reflect as a mirror the glory of the Lord_ 2 Corinthians 3:18, and proceed from _glory to glory_, in Christ Jesus our Lord:— To whom be honour, and might, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Source: Translated by Edwin Hamilton Gifford. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 7. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894.

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