

Homily on Matthew 25:26-28

John Chrysostom

Patristic · Nicene & Post-Nicene · Homily

STROMATA 02

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INTRODUCTION

Delivered in Antioch during the 390s as part of a sustained preaching cycle through Matthew's Gospel, this homily fastens on the moment of institution at the Last Supper and lingers over a single, disquieting fact: Judas received the bread. From that scandal, the preacher moves outward to the meaning of the Eucharist as the fulfillment of Passover, the gravity of approaching the table unworthily, and Christ's thanksgiving as a pattern for bearing suffering. The Matthew homilies would shape Byzantine eucharistic theology for centuries and remain among the fullest patristic treatments of the institution narrative. Expect direct, searching pastoral exhortation, closer to the pulpit than to the lecture hall, and unsparing in its application.

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; This is my body." "And He took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; This is my blood of the New Testament, Which is shed for many, for the remission of sins."

Ah! how great is the blindness of the traitor! Even partaking of the mysteries, he remained the same; and admitted to the most holy table, he changed not. And this Luke shows by saying, that after this Satan entered (Luke 22:3; see also John 13:27.) into him, not as despising the Lord's body, but thenceforth laughing to scorn the traitor's shamelessness. For indeed his sin became greater from both causes, as well in that he came to the mysteries with such a disposition, as that having approached them, he did not become better, either from fear, or from the benefit, or from the honor. But Christ forbade him not, although He knew all things, that thou mightest learn that He omits none of the things that pertain to correction. Wherefore both before this, and after this, He continually admonished him, and checked him, both by deeds, and by words; both by fear, and by kindness; both by threatening, and by honor. But none of these things withdrew him from that grievous pest.

Wherefore thenceforth He leaves him, and by the mysteries again reminds the disciples of His being slain, and in the midst of the meal His discourse is of the cross, by the continual repeating of the prediction, making His passion easy to receive. For if, when so many things had been done and foretold, they were troubled; if they had heard none of these things, what would they not have felt? "And as they were eating, He took bread, and brake it." Why can it have been that He ordained this sacrament then,

at the time of the passover? That thou mightest learn from everything, both that He is the lawgiver of the Old Testament, and that the things therein are foreshadowed because of these things. Therefore, I say, where the type is, there He puts the truth.

But the evening is a sure sign of the fullness of times, and that the things were now come to the very end.

And He gives thanks, to teach us how we ought to celebrate this sacrament, and to show that not unwillingly doth He come to the passion, and to teach us whatever we may suffer to bear it thankfully, thence also suggesting good hopes. For if the type was a deliverance from such bondage, how much more will the truth set free the world, and will He be delivered up for the benefit of our race. Wherefore, I would add, neither did He appoint the sacrament before this, but when henceforth the rites of the law were to cease. And thus the very chief of the feasts He brings to an end, removing them to another most awful table, and He saith, "Take, eat, This is my body, Which is broken for many."

And how were they not confounded at hearing this? Because He had before told unto them many and great things touching this. Wherefore that He establishes no more, for they had heard it sufficiently, but he speaks of the cause of His passion, namely, the taking away of sins. And He calls it blood of a New Testament, that of the undertaking, the promise, the new law. For this He undertook also of old, and this comprises the Testament that is in the new law. And like as the Old Testament had sheep and bullocks, so this has the Lord's blood. Hence also He shows that He is soon to die, wherefore also He made mention of a Testament, and He reminds them also of the former Testament, for that also was dedicated with blood. And again He tells the cause of His death, "which is shed for many for the remission of sins;" and He saith, "Do this in remembrance of me." Seest thou how He removes and draws them off from Jewish customs. For like as ye did that, He saith, in remembrance of the miracles in Egypt, so do this likewise in remembrance of me. That was shed for the preservation of the firstborn, this for the remission of the sins of the whole world. For, "This," saith He, "is my blood, which is shed for the remission of sins."

But this He said, indicating thereby, that His passion and His cross are a mystery, by this too again comforting His disciples. And like as Moses saith, "This shall be to you for an everlasting memorial," (Exodus 12:14.) so He too, "in remembrance of me," until I come (1 Corinthians 11:26). Therefore also He saith, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover," (Luke 22:15) that is, to deliver you the new rites, and to give a passover, by which I am to make you spiritual.

And He Himself drank of it. For lest on hearing this, they should say, What then? do we drink blood, and eat flesh? and then be perplexed (for when He began to discourse concerning these things, even at the very sayings many were offended), (John 6:60, 61, 66) therefore lest they should be troubled then likewise, He first did this Himself, leading them to the calm participation of the mysteries. Therefore He Himself drank His own blood. What then must we observe that other ancient rite also? some one may say. By no means. For on this account He said, "Do this," that He might withdraw them from the other. For if this worketh remission of sins, as it surely doth work it, the other is now superfluous.

As then in the case of the Jews, so here also He hath bound up the memorial of the benefit with the mystery, by this again stopping the mouths of heretics. For when they say, Whence is it manifest that Christ was sacrificed? together with the other arguments we stop their mouths from the mysteries also. For if Jesus did not die, of what are the rites the symbols?

- Seest thou how much diligence hath been used, that it should be ever borne in mind that He died for us? For since the Marcionists, and Valentinians, and Manichæans were to arise, denying this dispensation, He continually reminds us of the passion even by the mysteries, (so that no man should be deceived); at once saving, and at the same time teaching by means of that sacred table. For this is the chief of the blessings; wherefore Paul also is in every way pressing this.

Then, when He had delivered it, He saith, "I will not drink of the fruit of this wine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:29) For because He had discoursed with them concerning passion and cross, He again introduces what He has to say of His resurrection, having made mention of a kingdom before them, table, and rise up in drunkenness, whereas it were meet to give thanks, and end with an hymn.

Hear this, as many as wait not again for the last prayer of the mysteries, for this is a symbol of that. He gave thanks before He gave it to His disciples, that we also may give thanks. He gave thanks, and sang an hymn after the giving, that we also may do this selfsame thing.

But for what reason doth He go forth unto the mountain? Making Himself manifest, that He may be taken, in order not to seem to hide himself. For He hastened to go to the place which was also known to Judas.

Then "He saith unto them, All ye shall be offended in me." (Matthew 26:31) After this He mentions also a prophecy, "For it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad:" (Zechariah 13:7, Mark 14:27) at once persuading them ever to give heed to the things that are written, and at same time making it plain that He was crucified, according to God's purpose; and by everything showing He was no alien from the old covenant, nor from the God preached therein, but that what is done is a dispensation, and that the prophets all proclaimed all things beforehand from the beginning that are comprised in the matter, so that they be quite confident about the better things also. And He teaches us to know what the disciples were before the crucifixion, what after the crucifixion. For indeed they who, when He was crucified, were not able so much as to stand their ground, these after His death were mighty, and stronger than adamant.

And this self-same thing is a demonstration of His death, the fright and cowardice, I mean, of His disciples. For if when so many things have been both done and said, still some are shameless, and say that He was not crucified; if none of these things had come to pass, to what pitch of wickedness would they not have proceeded? So for this reason, not by His own sufferings only, but by what took place with respect to the disciples, He confirms the word concerning His death, and by the mysteries also, in every way confounding those that are diseased with the pest of Marcion. For this reason He suffers even the chief apostle to deny Him. But if He was not bound nor crucified, whence sprung the fear to Peter, and to the rest of the apostles.

He suffers them not however, on the other hand, to wait until the sorrows, but what saith He? "But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." (Matthew 26:32) For not from Heaven doth He appear at once, neither will He depart into any distant country, but in the same nation, in which He had also been crucified, nearly in the same place, so as hereby again to assure them that He that was crucified was the very same that rose again, and in this way to comfort them more abundantly when in sorrow. Therefore also He said "in Galilee," that being freed from the fears of the Jews they might believe His saying. For which cause indeed He appeared there.

"But Peter answered and said, Though all men should be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." (Matthew 26:33, Mark 14:29)

- What sayest thou, O Peter? the prophet said, "The sheep shall be scattered;" Christ hath confirmed the saying, and sayest thou, No? Is not what passed before enough, when Thou saidst, "Far be it from Thee," (Matthew 16:22) and thy mouth was stopped? For this then He suffers him to fall, teaching him thereby to believe Christ in all things, and to account His declaration more trustworthy than one's own conscience. And the rest too reaped no small benefit from his denial, having come to know man's weakness, and God's truth. For when He foretells anything, we must no longer be subtle, nor lift up ourselves above the common sort. For, "thy rejoicing," it is said, "thou shalt have in thyself, and not in another." (Galatians 6:4) For where he should have prayed, and have said, Help us, that we be not cut off, he is confident in himself, and saith, "Though all men should be offended in Thee, yet will I never;" though all should undergo this, I shall not undergo it, which led him on by little and little to self-confidence. Christ then, out of a desire to put down this, permitted his denial. For since he neither submitted to Him nor the prophet (and yet for this intent He brought in the prophet besides, that they may not gainsay), but nevertheless since he submitted not to His words, he is instructed by deeds.

For in proof that for this intent He permitted it, that He might amend this in him, hear what He saith, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." (Luke 22:32) For this He said sharply reproving him, and showing that his fall was more grievous than the rest, and needed more help. For the matters of blame were two; both that he gainsaid; and, that he set himself before the other; or rather a third too, namely, that he attributed all to himself.

To cure these things then, He suffered the fall to take place, and for this cause also leaves the others, and addresses Himself earnestly to him. For, "Simon," (Luke 22:31) saith He, "Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat;" that is, that he may trouble, confound, tempt you; but "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

And why, if Satan desired all, did He not say concerning all, I have prayed for you? Is it not quite plain that it is this, which I have mentioned before, that it is as reproving him, and showing that his fall was more grievous than the rest, that He directs His words to him?

And wherefore said He not, But I did not suffer it, rather than, "I have prayed?" He speaks from this time lowly things, on His way to His passion, that He may show His humanity. For He that has built His church upon Peter's confession, and has so fortified it, that ten thousand dangers and deaths are not to prevail over it; He that hath given him the keys of Heaven, and hath put him in possession of so much authority, and in no manner needed a prayer for these ends (for neither did He say, I have prayed, but with His own authority, "I will build my church, and I will give thee the keys of Heaven"), how should He need to pray, that He might brace up the shaken soul of a single man? Wherefore then did He speak in this way? For the cause which I mentioned, and because of their weakness, for they had not as yet the becoming view of Him. How then was it that He denied? he said not, that thou mayest not deny, but that thy faith fail not, that thou perish not utterly. For this came from His care. For indeed fear had driven out all else, for it was beyond measure, and it became beyond measure, since God had to an exceeding degree deprived him of His help, and He did exceedingly deprive him thereof, because there was to an exceeding degree in him the passion of self-will and contradiction. In order then that He might pluck it up by the roots, therefore He suffered the terror to overtake him.

For in proof that this passion was grievous in him, he was not content with his former words, gainsaying both prophet and Christ, but also after these things when Christ had said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice," he replieth, "Though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee in any wise." (Matthew 26:34, 35) And Luke signifies moreover, that the more Christ warned him, so much the more did Peter exceedingly oppose Him.

What mean these things, O Peter? When He was saying, "One of you shall betray me," thou didst fear lest thou shouldest be the traitor, and didst constrain the disciple to ask, although conscious to thyself of no such thing; but now, when He is plainly crying out, and saying, "All shall be offended," art thou gainsaying it, and not once only, but twice and often? For this is what Luke saith.

Whence then did this come to him? From much love, from much pleasure. I mean, that after that he was delivered from that distressing fear about the betrayal, and knew the traitor, he then spoke confidently, and lifted himself up over the rest, saying, "Though all men shall be offended, yet will I not be of-

fended." (Matthew 26:33) And in some degree too his conduct sprung from jealousy, for at supper they reasoned "which of them is the greater," (Luke 22:24) to such a degree did this passion trouble them. Therefore He checked him, not compelling him to the denial, God forbid! but leaving him destitute of His help, and convicting human nature.

See at any rate after these things how he was subdued. For after the resurrection, when he had said, "And what shall this man do?" (John 21:21) and was silenced, he ventured no more to gainsay as here, but held his peace. Again, towards the assumption, when he heard, "It is not for you to know times or seasons," (Acts 1:7) again he holds his peace, and contradicts not. After these things, on the house, and by the sheet, when he heard a voice saying to him, "What God hath cleansed, call not thou common," (Acts 10:15) even though he knew not for the time what the saying could be, he is quiet, and strives not.

- All these things did that fall effect, and whereas before that he attributes all to himself, saying, "Though all men shall be offended, yet will I not be offended;" and, "If I should die, I will not deny Thee" (when he should have said, If I receive the assistance from Thee); -- yet after these things altogether the contrary, "Why do ye give heed to us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made him to walk?" (Acts 3:12)

Hence we learn a great doctrine, that a man's willingness is not sufficient, unless any one receive the succor from above; and that again we shall gain nothing by the succor from above, if there be not a willingness. And both these things do Judas and Peter show; for the one, though he had received much help, was profited nothing, because he was not willing, neither contributed his part; but this one, though he was ready in mind, because he received no assistance, fell. For indeed of these two things is virtue's web woven.

Wherefore I entreat you neither (when you have cast all upon God) to sleep yourselves, nor, when laboring earnestly, to think to accomplish all by your own toils. For neither is it God's will that we should be supine ourselves, therefore He worketh it not all Himself; nor yet boasters, therefore He did not give all to us; but having removed what was hurtful in either way, left that which is useful for us. Therefore He suffered even the chief apostle to fall, both rendering him more humbled in mind, and training him thenceforth to greater love. "For to whom more is forgiven," it is said, "he loveth more." (Luke 7:47) Let us then in everything believe God, and gainsay Him in nothing, though what is said seem to be contrary to our thoughts and senses, but let His word be of higher authority than both reasonings and sight. Thus let us do in the mysteries also, not looking at the things set before us, but keeping in mind His sayings. For His word cannot deceive, but our senses are easily beguiled. That hath never failed, but this in most things goeth wrong. Since then the word saith, "This is my body," let us both be persuaded and believe, and look at it with the eyes of the mind.

For Christ hath given nothing sensible, but though in things sensible yet all to be perceived by the mind. So also in baptism, the gift is bestowed by a sensible thing, that is, by water; but that which is done is perceived by the mind, the birth, I mean, and the renewal. For if thou hadst been incorporeal, He would have delivered thee the incorporeal gifts bare; but because the soul hath been locked up in a body, He delivers thee the things that the mind perceives, in things sensible.

How many now say, I would wish to see His form, the mark, His clothes, His shoes. Lo! thou seest Him, Thou touchest Him, thou eatest Him. And thou indeed desirest to see His clothes, but He giveth Himself to thee not to see only, but also to touch and eat and receive within thee.

Let then no one approach it with indifference, no one faint-hearted, but all with burning hearts, all fervent, all aroused. For if Jews standing, and having on their shoes and their staves in their hands, ate with haste, much more oughtest thou to be watchful. For they indeed were to go forth to Palestine, wherefore also they had the garb of pilgrims, but thou art about to remove unto Heaven.

- Wherefore it is needful in all respects to be vigilant, for indeed no small punishment is appointed to them that partake unworthily.

Consider how indignant thou art against the traitor, against them that crucified Him. Look therefore, lest thou also thyself become guilty of the body and blood of Christ. They slaughtered the all-holy body, but thou receivest it in a filthy soul after such great benefits. For neither was it enough for Him to be made man, to be smitten and slaughtered, but He also commingleth Himself with us, and not by faith only, but also in very deed maketh us His body. What then ought not he to exceed in purity that hath the benefit of this sacrifice, than what sunbeam should not that hand be more pure which is to sever this flesh, the mouth that is filled with spiritual fire, the tongue that is reddened by that most awful blood? Consider with what sort of honor thou wast honored, of what sort of table thou art partaking. That which when angels behold, they tremble, and dare not so much as look up at it without awe on account of the brightness that cometh thence, with this we are fed, with this we are commingled, and we are made one body and one flesh with Christ. "Who shall declare the mighty works of the Lord, and cause all His praises to be heard?" (Psalm 106:2) What shepherd feeds his sheep with his own limbs? And why do I say, shepherd? There are often mothers that after the travail of birth send out their children to other women as nurses; but He endureth not to do this, but Himself feeds us with His own blood, and by all means entwines us with Himself.

Mark it, He was born of our substance. But, you say, this is nothing to all men; though it does concern all. For if He came unto our nature, it is quite plain that it was to all; but if to all, then to each one. And how was it, you say, that all did not reap the profit therefrom. This was not of His doing, whose choice it was to do this in behalf of all, but the fault of them that were not willing. With each one of the faithful doth He mingle Himself in the mysteries, and whom He begat, He nourishes by Himself, and putteth not out to another; by this also persuading thee again, that He had taken thy flesh. Let us not then be remiss, having been counted worthy of so much both of love and honor. See ye not the infants with how much eagerness they lay hold of the breast? with what earnest desire they fix their lips upon the nipple? With the like let us also approach this table, and the nipple of the spiritual cup. Or rather, with much more eagerness let us, as infants at the breast, draw out the grace of the spirit, let it be our

one sorrow, not to partake of this food. The works set before us are not of man's power. He that then did these things at that supper, this same now also works them. We occupy the place of servants. He who sanctifieth and changeth them is the same. Let then no Judas be present, no covetous man. If any one be not a disciple, let him withdraw, the table receives not such. For "I keep the passover," He saith, "with my disciples." (Matthew 26:18)

This table is the same as that, and hath nothing less. For it is not so that Christ wrought that, and man this, but He doth this too. This is that upper chamber, where they were then; and hence they went forth unto the mount of Olives.

Let us also go out unto the hands of the poor, for this spot is the mount of Olives. For the multitude of the poor are olive-trees planted in the house of God, dropping the oil, which is profitable for us there, which the five virgins had, and the others that had not received perished thereby. Having received this, let us enter in that with bright lamps we may meet the bridegroom; having received this, let us go forth hence.

Let no inhuman person be present, no one that is cruel and merciless, no one at all that is unclean.

- These things I say to you that receive, and to you that minister. For it is necessary to address myself to you also, that you may with much care distribute the gifts there. There is no small punishment for you, if being conscious of any wickedness in any man, you allow him to partake of this table. "His blood shall be required at your hands." (Ezekiel 33:8) Though any one be a general, though a deputy, though it be he himself who is invested with the diadem, and come unworthily, forbid him, the authority thou hast is greater than his. Thou, if thou wert entrusted to keep a spring of water clean for a flock, and then wert to see a sheep having much mire on its mouth, thou wouldest not suffer it to stoop down unto it and foul the stream: but now being entrusted with a spring not of water, but of blood and of spirit, if thou seest any having on them sin, which is more grievous than earth and mire, coming unto it, art thou not displeased? dost thou not drive them off? and what excuse canst thou have?

For this end God hath honored you with this honor, that ye should discern these things. This is your office, this your safety, this your whole crown, not that ye should go about clothed in a white and shining vestment.

And whence know I, you may say, this person, and that person? I speak not of the unknown, but of the notorious.

Shall I say something more fearful. It is not so grievous a thing for the energumens to be within, as for such as these, whom Paul affirms to trample Christ under foot, and to "account the blood of the covenant unclean, and to do despite to the grace of the Spirit." (Hebrews 10:29) For he that hath fallen into sin and draws nigh, is worse than one possessed with a devil. For they, because they are possessed are not punished, but those, when they draw nigh unworthily, are delivered over to undying punishment. Let us not therefore drive away these only, but all without exception, whomsoever we may see coming unworthily.

Let no one communicate who is not of the disciples. Let no Judas receive, lest he suffer the fate of Judas. This multitude also is Christ's body. Take heed, therefore, thou that ministerest at the mysteries, lest thou provoke the Lord, not purging this body. Give not a sword instead of meat.

Nay, though it be from ignorance that he come to communicate, forbid him, be not afraid. Fear God, not man. If thou shouldest fear man, thou wilt be laughed to scorn even by him, but if God, thou wilt be an object of respect even to men. But if thou darest not to do it thyself, bring him to me; I will not allow any to dare do these things. I would give up my life rather than impart of the Lord's blood to the unworthy; and will shed my own blood rather than impart of such awful blood contrary to what is meet.

But if any hath not known the bad man, after much inquiry, it is no blame. For these things have been said about the open sinners. For if we amend these, God will speedily discover to us the unknown also; but if we let these alone, wherefore should He then make manifest those that are hidden.

But these things I say, not that we repel them only, nor cut them off, but in order that we may amend them, and bring them back, that we may take care of them. For thus shall we both have God propitious, and shall find many to receive worthily; and for our own diligence, and for our care for others, receive

great reward; unto which God grant we may all attain by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory world without end.

Amen.

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