

Procatechesis (Prologue)

Cyril of Jerusalem

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

STROMATA 36

Downloaded from The Stromata (thestromata.com). Free for personal, educational, and ministry use.

INTRODUCTION

Delivered in Jerusalem around 350, these words open a series of catechetical lectures addressed to candidates preparing for baptism at Easter, the catechumens who would soon descend into the font during the Paschal vigil. Cyril, then a presbyter and later bishop of the city where the events of the Passion took place, speaks to his hearers on the threshold, warning against the half-conversion of Simon Magus and the wedding guest without a garment. The Procatechesis stands at the headwaters of the mystagogical tradition that would shape Christian initiation East and West for centuries. Read it as a pastor's threshold address: urgent, searching, meant to be heard standing up.

Procatechesis (Prologue)

Already there is an odour of blessedness upon you, O you who are soon to be enlightened : already you are gathering the spiritual flowers, to weave heavenly crowns: already the fragrance of the Holy Spirit has breathed upon you: already you have gathered round the vestibule of the King's palace ; may you be led in also by the King! For blossoms now have appeared upon the trees ; may the fruit also be found perfect! Thus far there has been an inscription of your names , and a call to service, and torches of the bridal train, and a longing for heavenly citizenship, and a good purpose, and hope attendant thereon. For he lies not who said, *“that to them that love God all things work together for good”*. God is lavish in beneficence, yet He waits for each man's genuine will: therefore the Apostle added and said, *“to them that are called according to a purpose”*. The honesty of purpose makes you called: for if your body be here but not your mind, it profits you nothing.

Even Simon Magus once came to the Laver : he was baptized, but was not enlightened; and though he dipped his body in water, he enlightened not his heart with the Spirit: his body went down and came up, but his soul was not buried with Christ, nor raised with Him. Now I mention the statements of (men's) falls, that you may not fall: for these things happened to them by way of example, *“and they are written for the admonition”* of those who to this day draw near. Let none of you be found tempting His grace, *“lest any root of bitterness spring up and trouble you”*. Let none of you enter saying, Let us see what the faithful are doing: let me go in and see, that I may learn what is being done. Do you expect to see,

and not expect to be seen? And do you think that while you are searching out what is going on, God is not searching your heart?

A certain man in the Gospels once pried into the marriage feast, and took an unbecoming garment, and came in, sat down, and ate: for the bridegroom permitted it. But when he saw them all clad in white, he ought to have assumed a garment of the same kind himself: whereas he partook of the like food, but was unlike them in fashion and in purpose. The bridegroom, however, though bountiful, was not undiscerning: and in going round to each of the guests and observing them (for his care was not for their eating, but for their seemly behaviour), he saw a stranger _not having on a wedding garment_, and said to him, _Friend, how did you get in here?_ In what a color! With what a conscience! What though the door-keeper forbade you not, because of the bountifulness of the entertainer? What though you were ignorant in what fashion you should come in to the banquet? — you came in, and saw the glittering fashions of the guests: should you not have been taught even by what was before your eyes? Should you not have retired in good season, that you might enter in good season again? But now you have come in unseasonably, to be unseasonably cast out. So he commands the servants, _Bind his feet_, which daringly intruded: _bind his hands_, which knew not how to put a bright garment around him: _and cast him into the outer darkness;_ for he is unworthy of the wedding torches. You see what happened to that man: make your own condition safe.

For we, the ministers of Christ, have admitted every one, and occupying, as it were, the place of door-keepers we left the door open: and possibly thou entered with your soul bemired with sins, and with a will defiled. You entered, and were allowed: your name was inscribed. Tell me, do you behold this venerable constitution of the Church? Do you view her order and discipline, the reading of Scriptures, the presence of the ordained, the course of instruction? Be abashed at the place, and be taught by what you see. Go out opportunely now, and enter most opportunely tomorrow.

If the fashion of your soul is avarice, put on another fashion and come in. Put off your former fashion, cloke it not up. Put off, I pray you, fornication and uncleanness, and put on the brightest robe of chastity. This charge I give you, before Jesus the Bridegroom of souls come in and see their fashions. A long notice is allowed you; you have forty days for repentance: you have full opportunity both to put off, and wash, and to put on and enter. But if you persist in an evil purpose, the speaker is blameless, but you must not look for the grace: for the water will receive, but the Spirit will not accept you. If any one is conscious of his wound, let him take the salve; if any has fallen, let him arise. Let there be no Simon among you, no hypocrisy, no idle curiosity about the matter.

Possibly too you have come on another pretext. It is possible that a man is wishing to pay court to a woman, and came hither on that account. The remark applies in like manner to women also in their turn. A slave also perhaps wishes to please his master, and a friend his friend. I accept this bait for the hook, and welcome you, though you came with an evil purpose, yet as one to be saved by a good hope. Perhaps you knew not whither you were coming, nor in what kind of net you are taken. You have come within the Church's nets: be taken alive, flee not: for Jesus is angling for you, not in order to kill, but by killing to make alive: for you must die and rise again. For you have heard the Apostle say, _Dead

indeed unto sin, but living unto righteousness_ . Die to your sins, and live to righteousness, live from this very day.

See, I pray you, how great a dignity Jesus bestows on you. You were called a Catechumen, while the word echoed round you from without; hearing of hope, and knowing it not; hearing mysteries, and not understanding them; hearing Scriptures, and not knowing their depth. The echo is no longer around you, but within you; for _the indwelling Spirit_ henceforth makes your mind a house of God. When you shall have heard what is written concerning the mysteries, then will you understand things which thou knew not. And think not that you receive a small thing: though a miserable man, you receive one of God's titles. Hear St. Paul saying, _God is faithful_ . Hear another Scripture saying, _God is faithful and just_ . Foreseeing this, the Psalmist, because men are to receive a title of God, spoke thus in the person of God: I said, _You are Gods, and are all sons of the Most High_. But beware lest thou have the title of _faithful_, but the will of the faithless. You have entered into a contest, toil on through the race: another such opportunity you cannot have. Were it your wedding day before you, would you not have disregarded all else, and set about the preparation for the feast? And on the eve of consecrating your soul to the heavenly Bridegroom, will you not cease from carnal things, that you may win spiritual?

We may not receive Baptism twice or thrice; else it might be said, Though I have failed once, I shall set it right a second time: whereas if you fail once, the thing cannot be set right; for there is _one Lord, and one faith, and one baptism_ : for only the heretics are re-baptized , because the former was no baptism.

For God seeks nothing else from us, save a good purpose. Say not, How are my sins blotted out? I tell you, By willing, by believing. What can be shorter than this? But if, while your lips declare you willing, your heart be silent, He knows the heart, who judges you. Cease from this day from every evil deed. Let not your tongue speak unseemly words, let your eye abstain from sin, and from roving after things unprofitable.

Let your feet hasten to the catechisings; receive with earnestness the exorcisms : whether thou be breathed upon or exorcised, the act is to you salvation. Suppose you have gold unwrought and alloyed, mixed with various substances, copper, and tin, and iron, and lead: we seek to have the gold alone; can gold be purified from the foreign substances without fire? Even so without exorcisms the soul cannot be purified; and these exorcisms are divine, having been collected out of the divine Scriptures. Your face has been veiled , that your mind may henceforward be free, lest the eye by roving make the heart rove also. But when your eyes are veiled, your ears are not hindered from receiving the means of salvation. For in like manner as those who are skilled in the goldsmith's craft throw in their breath upon the fire through certain delicate instruments, and blowing up the gold which is hidden in the crucible stir the flame which surrounds it, and so find what they are seeking; even so when the exorcists inspire terror by the Spirit of God, and set the soul, as it were, on fire in the crucible of the body, the hostile demon flees away, and there abide salvation and the hope of eternal life, and the soul henceforth is cleansed from its sins and has salvation. Let us then, brethren, abide in hope, and surrender ourselves, and hope, in order that the God of all may see our purpose, and cleanse us from our sins, and impart to us good hopes of our estate, and grant us repentance that brings salvation. God has called, and His call is to you.

Attend closely to the catechisings, and though we should prolong our discourse, let not your mind be wearied out. For you are receiving armour against the adverse power, armour against heresies, against Jews, and Samaritans, and Gentiles. You have many enemies; take to you many darts, for you have many to hurl them at: and you have need to learn how to strike down the Greek, how to contend against heretic, against Jew and Samaritan. And the armour is ready, and most ready _the sword of the Spirit_ : but thou also must stretch forth your right hand with good resolution, that you may war the Lord's warfare, and overcome adverse powers, and become invincible against every heretical attempt.

Let me give you this charge also. Study our teachings and keep them forever. Think not that they are the ordinary homilies ; for though they also are good and trustworthy, yet if we should neglect them today we may study them tomorrow. But if the teaching concerning the laver of regeneration delivered in a consecutive course be neglected today, when shall it be made right? Suppose it is the season for planting trees: if we do not dig, and dig deep, when else can that be planted rightly which has once been planted ill? Suppose, pray, that the Catechising is a kind of building: if we do not bind the house together by regular bonds in the building, lest some gap be found, and the building become unsound, even our former labour is of no use. But stone must follow stone by course, and corner match with corner, and by our smoothing off inequalities the building must thus rise evenly. In like manner we are bringing to you stones, as it were, of knowledge. You must hear concerning the living God, you must hear of Judgment, must hear of Christ, and of the Resurrection. And many things there are to be discussed in succession, which though now dropped one by one are afterwards to be presented in harmonious connection. But unless thou fit them together in the one whole, and remember what is first, and what is second, the builder may build, but you will find the building unsound.

When, therefore, the Lecture is delivered, if a Catechumen ask you what the teachers have said, tell nothing to him that is without. For we deliver to you a mystery, and a hope of the life to come. Guard the mystery for Him who gives the reward. Let none ever say to you, What harm to you, if I also know it? So too the sick ask for wine; but if it be given at a wrong time it causes delirium, and two evils arise; the sick man dies, and the physician is blamed. Thus is it also with the Catechumen, if he hear anything from the believer: both the Catechumen becomes delirious (for he understands not what he has heard, and finds fault with the thing, and scoffs at what is said), and the believer is condemned as a traitor. But you are now standing on the border: take heed, pray, to tell nothing out; not that the things spoken are not worthy to be told, but because his ear is unworthy to receive. You were once yourself a Catechumen, and I described not what lay before you. When by experience you have learned how high are the matters of our teaching, then you will know that the Catechumens are not worthy to hear them.

You who have been enrolled have become sons and daughters of one Mother. When you have come in before the hour of the exorcisms, let each one of you speak things tending to godliness: and if any of your number be not present, seek for him. If you were called to a banquet, would you not wait for your fellow ? If you had a brother, would you not seek your brother's good?

Afterwards busy not yourself about unprofitable matters: neither, what the city has done, nor the village, nor the King , nor the Bishop, nor the Presbyter. Look upward; that is what your present hour needs. _Be still_ , _and know that I am God_. If you see the believers ministering, and showing no care, they enjoy security, they know what they have received, they are in possession of grace. But you stand just now in the turn of the scale, to be received or not: copy not those who have freedom from anxiety, but cherish fear.

And when the Exorcism has been done, until the others who are being exorcised have come , let men be with men, and women with women. For now I need the example of Noah's ark: in which were Noah and his sons, and his wife and his sons' wives. For though the ark was one, and the door was shut, yet had things been suitably arranged. If the Church is shut, and you are all inside, yet let there be a separation, men with men, and women with women : lest the pretext of salvation become an occasion of destruction. Even if there be a fair pretext for sitting near each other, let passions be put away. Further, let the men when sitting have a useful book; and let one read, and another listen: and if there be no book, let one pray, and another speak something useful. And again let the party of young women sit together in like manner, either singing or reading quietly, so that their lips speak, but others' ears catch not the sound: _for I suffer not a woman to speak in the Church_. And let the married woman also follow the same example, and pray; and let her lips move, but her voice be unheard, that a Samuel may come, and your barren soul give birth to the salvation of God who has heard your prayer; for this is the interpretation of the name Samuel.

I shall observe each man's earnestness, each woman's reverence. Let your mind be refined as by fire unto reverence; let your soul be forged as metal: let the stubbornness of unbelief be hammered out: let the superfluous scales of the iron drop off, and what is pure remain; let the rust of the iron be rubbed off, and the true metal remain. May God sometime show you that night, the darkness which shines like the day, concerning which it is said, _The darkness shall not be hidden from you, and the night shall

shine as the day_. Then may the gate of Paradise be opened to every man and every woman among you. Then may you enjoy the Christ-bearing waters in their fragrance. Then may you receive the name of Christ , and the power of things divine. Even now, I beseech you, lift up the eye of the mind: even now imagine the choirs of Angels, and God the Lord of all there sitting, and His Only-begotten Son sitting with Him on His right hand, and the Spirit present with them; and Thrones and Dominions doing service, and every man of you and every woman receiving salvation. Even now let your ears ring, as it were, with that glorious sound, when over your salvation the angels shall chant, _Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered_ : when like stars of the Church you shall enter in, bright in the body and radiant in the soul.

Great is the Baptism that lies before you : a ransom to captives; a remission of offenses; a death of sin; a new-birth of the soul; a garment of light; a holy indissoluble seal; a chariot to heaven; the delight of Paradise; a welcome into the kingdom; the gift of adoption! But there is a serpent by the wayside watching those who pass by: beware lest he bite you with unbelief. He sees so many receiving salvation, and is _seeking whom he may devour_. You are coming in unto the Father of Spirits, but you are going past that serpent. How then may you pass him? Have _your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace_ ; that even if he bite, he may not hurt you. Have faith in-dwelling, stedfast hope, a strong sandal, that you may pass the enemy, and enter the presence of your Lord. Prepare your own heart for reception of doctrine, for fellowship in holy mysteries. Pray more frequently, that God may make you worthy of the heavenly and immortal mysteries. Cease not day nor night: but when sleep is banished from your eyes, then let your mind be free for prayer. And if you find any shameful thought rise up in your mind, turn to meditation upon Judgment to remind you of Salvation. Give your mind wholly to study, that it may forget base things. If you find any one saying to you, Are you then going in, to descend into the water? Has the city just now no baths? Take notice that it is _the dragon of the sea_ who is laying these plots against you. Attend not to the lips of the talker, but to God who works in you. Guard your own soul, that thou be not ensnared, to the end that abiding in hope you may become an heir of everlasting salvation.

We for our part as men charge and teach you thus: but make not our building _hay and stubble_ and chaff, lest we _suffer loss_, from our _work being burnt up_: but make our work gold, _and silver, and precious stones_! For it lies in me to speak, but in you to set your mind upon it, and in God to make perfect. Let us nerve our minds, and brace up our souls, and prepare our hearts. The race is for our soul: our hope is of things eternal: and God, who knows your hearts, and observes who is sincere, and who is a hypocrite, is able both to guard the sincere, and to give faith to the hypocrite: for even to the unbeliever, if only he give his heart, God is able to give faith. So may He _blot out the handwriting that is against you_ , and grant you forgiveness of your former trespasses; may He plant you into His Church, and enlist you in His own service, and put on you _the armour of righteousness_ : may He fill you with the heavenly things of the New Covenant, and give you the seal of the Holy Spirit indelible throughout all ages, in Christ Jesus Our Lord: to whom be the glory for ever and ever! Amen.

(_To the Reader_.)

These Catechetical Lectures for those who are to be enlightened you may lend to candidates for Baptism, and to believers who are already baptized, to read, but give not at all, neither to Catechumens, nor to any others who are not Christians, as you shall answer to the Lord. And if you make a copy, write this in the beginning, as in the sight of the Lord.

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.

Text sourced from New Advent (newadvent.org). Original translation public domain (pre-1900). Accessed April 2026.

Translation: Gifford translation, 1894. Edwin Hamilton Gifford (1820–1905) — translation public domain. No separate translation copyright applies.

<https://www.thestromata.com/texts/procatechesis-prologue>