

“The Golden Mouth Chrysostom”

A great preacher of the Church

**John Chrysostom**

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Jeremiah 1: 4-10

Luke 21: 12-15

Psalm 49: 1-8

### **In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

The priestly office was defined in John Chrysostom’s “classic manual” as one of awesome demands. The priest, he wrote in his treatise, “Six Books on the Priesthood,” must be “dignified, but not haughty; awe-inspiring, but kind; affable in his authority; impartial, but courteous; humble, but not servile; strong but gentle...” Ordained a priest in a time when one needed to be at least 30 years old, John Chrysostom was a great saint of the Eastern Church.

In the year 407 he was Archbishop of Constantinople. He was born about 354 in Antioch, Syria and studied under the pagan Libanius who said of him on his deathbed, that John would have been his successor “if the Christians had not taken him from us.” Libanius was a great teacher of his time, and John a great student of Libanius’.

Chrysostom is English for the Greek expression, “Golden Mouth.” As a preacher, John is noted as one of history’s great ones.

One encyclopedia text says of him:

*Over the course of twelve years, he gained popularity because of the eloquence of his public speaking, especially his insightful expositions of Bible passages and moral teaching. The most valuable of his works from this period are his Homilies on various books of the Bible. He emphasized charitable giving and was concerned with the spiritual and temporal needs of the poor. He also spoke out against abuse of wealth and personal property. He said:*

*Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad. He who said: "This is my body" is the same who said: "You saw me hungry and you gave me no food", and "Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me"... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices when your*

***brother is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well.***

His Homilies were straightforwardly given. He was not given to allegory. As an Archbishop he founded hospitals for the poor in Constantinople and said in this famous quote:

*"In the matter of piety, poverty serves us better than wealth, and work better than idleness, especially since wealth becomes an obstacle even for those who do not devote themselves to it. Yet, when we must put aside our wrath, quench our envy, soften our anger, offer our prayers, and show a disposition which is reasonable, mild, kindly, and loving, how could poverty stand in our way? For we accomplish these things not by spending money but by making the correct choice. Almsgiving above all else requires money, but even this shines with a brighter luster when the alms are given from our poverty. The widow who paid in the two mites was poorer than any human, but she outdid them all."*

As a Homilist, the Archbishop believed the classic advantages of the homily were as the form of promised preaching used from the very beginning of Christianity. Simple and easily understood, the homily gives better opportunity for interweaving sacred scripture. So it is said. The early Mass is the best time for the homily, called the appropriate time, and it affords a less formal sermon than that of the principal Mass.

Not of a speculative mind, yet a fine theologian, John Chrysostom spoke the higher form of homily known as the fourth kind. The fourth kind is that which first paraphrases and explains the entire Gospel, and then makes an application of it.

Our reading from Jeremiah tells of the great orator the prophet Jeremiah was, and we attribute similarly to John Chrysostom:

***Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me,***

***"Now I have put my words in your mouth..."***

And in our Gospel it reads:

***For I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.***

This homilist likes this quote from John Chrysostom's homily "In Praise of Saint Paul:"

*The most important thing of all to Paul, however, was that he knew himself to be loved by Christ. Enjoying this love, he considered himself happier than anyone else; were he without it, it would be no satisfaction to be the friend of principalities and powers. He preferred to be loved and be the least of all, or even to be among the damned, than be without that love and be among the great and honored.*

John Chrysostom could almost be speaking of himself. And note, how straightforward the preacher John Chrysostom is in his remarks on Saint Paul.

Eloquent, yes. Here he gives the homily preached in Constantinople before he went into exile:

*The waves have risen and the surging sea is dangerous, but we do not fear drowning for we stand upon the rock. Let the sea surge! It cannot destroy the rock. Let the waves rise! They cannot sink the boat of Jesus. Tell me, what are we to fear? Is it death? But "for me life is Christ, and death is gain." So tell me, is it exile? "The earth is the Lord's and all that it contains." Is it the confiscation of property? "We brought nothing into the world and it is certain we can take nothing out of it." I have nothing but contempt for the threats of this world; its treasures I ridicule. I am not afraid of poverty. I do not crave after wealth, I am not afraid of death, and I do not seek to live except to be of help to you. So I simply mention my present circumstances and call on you, my dear people, to remain steadfast in your love.*

Eloquent, yes. Straightforward, yes.

Let us remember that John Chrysostom set about reforming the church and exposing corruption among the clergy and in the Imperial Administration. "Mules bear fortunes and Christ dies of hunger at your gate," he is reputed to have cried out. His dying words were, when dying of exhaustion and starvation in September 407, "Glory be to God for everything."

So we pray with John Chrysostom, and this Homily is a form of prayerful statement for it is “Glory be to God for everything.”

As our prayer book offers, let us end with “A Prayer of Saint Chrysostom:”

*Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen.*