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HOMILY ELEVEN

ON THE PRECIOUS AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS¹³³

THE CROSS OF CHRIST was mysteriously proclaimed in advance and foreshadowed from generations of old and no one was ever reconciled with God except by the power of the Cross. After our First Parents transgressed against God through the tree in paradise, sin came to life, but we died, submitting, even before physical death, to the death of the soul, its separation from God. After the transgression we lived in sin and according to the flesh. Sin “is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7–8).

2. As the apostle says, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17). God, however, is Spirit, absolute Goodness and Virtue, and our own spirit is after His image and likeness, although sin has made it good for nothing. So how could anyone at all be spiritually renewed and reconciled with God, unless sin and life according to the flesh had been abolished? The Cross of Christ is this abolition of sin. One of our God-bearing Fathers was asked by an unbeliever if he really believed in Christ crucified. “Yes”, he replied, “I believe in Him who crucified sin.”¹³⁴ God Himself has borne witness that there were many who were His friends before and after the law, when the Cross had not yet been revealed. David, the king and prophet, says, as if there were definitely friends of God in his day, “How precious also are thy friends unto me, O God!” (Ps. 139:17 Lxx). I shall now show you, if you listen attentively for the love of God, how it was that people were called friends of God before the Cross.

3. Although the man of sin, the son of lawlessness (*cf.* 2 Thess. 2:3), by which I mean Antichrist, has not yet come, the theologian whom Christ

loved says, “Even now, Beloved, there is antichrist” (*cf.* 1 John 2:18). In the same way, the Cross existed in the time of our ancestors, even before it was accomplished. The great Paul teaches us absolutely clearly that Antichrist is among us, even though he has not yet come, saying, “His mystery doth already work in you” (*cf.* 2 Thess. 2:7). In exactly the same way Christ’s Cross was among our forefathers before it came into being, because its mystery was working in them.

4. Leaving aside Abel, Seth, Enos, Enoch, Noah, and all those up until Noah who were pleasing to God, and their contemporaries, I shall begin with Abraham, who was called the father of many nations, the Jews’ father after the flesh and ours by faith. As I am to start with this spiritual father of ours, his good beginning and God’s initial call to him, what were the first words God spoke to him? “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, unto a land that I will show thee” (Gen. 12:1). This utterance certainly bears within it the mystery of the Cross, for it is exactly what Paul says when he glories in the Cross: “The world is crucified unto me” (Gal. 6:14). When someone has fled his home country or the world without turning back, for him his country according to the flesh and the world have been put to death and ceased to exist, and this is the Cross.¹³⁵

5. God said to Abraham, before he had fled from his life with ungodly men, “Get thee out of thy country unto a land”, not, that I will give thee, but “that I will show thee” (Gen. 12:1), so that through this land another, spiritual land might be shown. What were God’s first words to Moses once he had fled from Egypt and ascended the mountain? “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet” (Exod. 3:5). This is another mystery of the Cross which follows appropriately upon the first. “You have come out of Egypt”, says God, “you have left the service of Pharaoh, and have despised the fact that you were called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. That world of evil servitude has been dissolved and ceased to exist, as far as you are concerned. Nevertheless you still need something more.” What can that be? “To take your shoes from off your feet, to lay aside the coats of skins (*cf.* Gen. 3:21) with which sin clothed you and in which it is at work, separating you from the holy ground. Take these shoes from your feet”, which is to say, “do not live any longer according to the flesh and in sin, but let that life which is opposed to God be abolished and put to death. And let the way of thinking based on the flesh (*cf.* Rom. 8:6–7), and the law in your members warring against the law of your mind, and bringing you into

HOMILY SIXTEEN

ABOUT THE DISPENSATION ACCORDING TO THE FLESH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THE GIFTS OF GRACE GRANTED TO THOSE WHO TRULY BELIEVE IN HIM

ALSO TEACHING THAT GOD WAS ABLE TO REDEEM MAN FROM
THE DEVIL'S TYRANNY IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS
BUT RIGHTLY PREFERRED THIS DISPENSATION
DELIVERED ON HOLY SATURDAY

THE PRE-ETERNAL, uncircumscribed and almighty Word and omnipotent Son of God could clearly have saved man from mortality and servitude to the devil without Himself becoming man. He upholds all things by the word of His power and everything is subject to His divine authority (*cf.* Heb. 1:3). According to Job, He can do everything and nothing is impossible for Him (*cf.* Job 42:2 Lxx). The strength of a created being cannot withstand the power of the Creator, and nothing is more powerful than the Almighty. But the incarnation of the Word of God was the method of deliverance most in keeping with our nature and weakness, and most appropriate for Him who carried it out, for this method had justice on its side, and God does not act without justice. As the psalmist and prophet says, "God is righteous and loveth righteousness" (*cf.* Ps. 11:7), "and there is no unrighteousness in Him" (Ps. 92:15). Man was justly abandoned by God in the beginning as he had first abandoned God. He had voluntarily approached the originator of evil, obeyed him when he treacherously advised the opposite of

what God had commanded, and was justly given over to him. In this way, through the evil one's envy and the good Lord's just consent, death came into the world. Because of the devil's overwhelming evil, death became twofold, for he brought about not just physical but also eternal death.

2. As we had been justly handed over to the devil's service and subjection to death, it was clearly necessary that the human race's return to freedom and life should be accomplished by God in a just way. Not only had man been surrendered to the envious devil by divine righteousness, but the devil had rejected righteousness and become wrongly enamoured of authority, arbitrary power and, above all, tyranny. He took up arms against justice and used his might against mankind. It pleased God that the devil be overcome first by the justice against which he continuously fought, then afterwards by power, through the resurrection and the future Judgment. Justice before power is the best order of events, and that force should come after justice is the work of a truly divine and good Lord, not of a tyrant.

3. Whereas he who was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44) attacked us out of envy and hatred, the author of life acted for our sake out of His overwhelming love for mankind and His goodness. The devil achieved his victory and man's fall unjustly and treacherously, but the Redeemer accomplished the final defeat of the originator of evil and the renewal of His creation with righteousness and wisdom. Earlier God left undone what it was in His power to do, so that He might first do what was fitting. In this way, justice was manifested more clearly, having been favoured by Him whose might is unconquerable. Men had to be taught to demonstrate righteousness in their actions now in the time of this mortal life, so that they might be strengthened to hold it fast when eternity comes.

4. It was also necessary for the conqueror to be conquered by that nature which he had conquered, and for the cheat to be outwitted. To this end it was necessary and indispensable that a man be made who would be sinless (*cf.* Job 14:4 Lxx). This was, however, impossible, for as the Scripture says, "No one is without sin, even if his life is one day" (Job 14:5 Lxx), and, "Who can say, I have made my heart clean?" (Prov. 20:9), and, "There is none sinless, but one, that is, God" (*cf.* Matt. 19:17, Mark 10:18). God the Word was from God, pre-eternally begotten of Him, and in Him – for we cannot even imagine that God was ever without His Word – being one God with Him. (For the sun's brightness is not a different light from the sun, and the sun's ray is not a different sun.) So the only sinless Son and

9. Elijah resurrected one person by prayer, and Elisha one during his lifetime and another after his death (2 Kgs. 13:21), as a pledge and foreshowing of Christ's life-giving energy as God and man. The Lord raised three people to life by a word of command before the Cross: this widow's son, the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue (Luke 8:41-42, 49-56),⁶⁹² and Lazarus who had been dead four days (John 11:17-45). On the Cross, however, He raised numerous dead people, who "appeared unto many" (Matt. 27:52-53). Besides this, He resurrected Himself after His death for us through the Cross, or rather, He rose again on the third day, having become the sole prince of eternal life (*cf.* Acts 3:15). All the others, even though they were resurrected, shared once more in this mortal life of ours. Now that Christ, however, has risen from the dead, "death hath no more dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9). That is why the Lord alone has become "the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20), that is to say, of those believers who have departed hence in the hope of resurrection and eternal life. He became the firstfruits of them that sleep and "the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18) and guaranteed and promised us, not this mortal life of ours which is subject to death, inasmuch as it is governed by a merely natural life-force, but the divine, immortal and eternal life which is laid up for us in hope. For this is His gift, truly worthy of God.⁶⁹³ Since, therefore, He does not bestow eternal life on those raised by Him here, but only life cut short by death, He does not grant it as a favour to them themselves, but does so for the sake of others, in order to lead them to faith, which procures eternal life.⁶⁹⁴ In this passage too, He did not restore the son to life for his own sake, but because of his mother, as He had compassion on her, as the evangelist clearly relates; which is why, once He had resurrected him, "He delivered him to his mother" (Luke 7:15).

10. Do you see how the Lord, pitying the widow who was mourning her son, did not just use consoling words to her, but helped her through His actions? As far as we are able, we too should do the same, and not be sympathetic to those who suffer just with words, but demonstrate our compassion for them through our deeds. If we show that we are doing good with all our strength, God will reward us by showing beneficence towards us with all His might in return. But take note how sublimely excellent this reward is. To the same extent that God is superior to man, so His power exceeds man's strength, and the kindness accomplished by this power outstrips that shown by

HOMILY FIFTY-THREE

ON THE ENTRY INTO THE HOLY OF HOLIES OF OUR EXCEEDINGLY PURE LADY MOTHER OF GOD AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY AND HER DIVINE MANNER OF LIFE THERE⁸⁰⁶

WHEN TASKS EXCEED HUMAN STRENGTH, whether it be necessary to move something very heavy or to engage in a struggle with words, men outstanding in their excellent physical strength and eloquence find themselves in the same position as those completely incapable in both respects, because they are all equally unable to achieve anything or to succeed in their purpose. If someone attempts to touch the stars with his hand, even though he is tall and stretches his arm further than the rest, he is almost as far away from those ethereal heights as men of much shorter stature, the difference not being worth mentioning. In the same way, on subjects transcending words, eminent speakers are not significantly better at saying something than anyone else. Who can attempt to treat of matters which utterly defy all words without being seen to give way beneath the weight of these topics, like those reputed to have boasted they could counterbalance the weight of the universe,⁸⁰⁷ or those in the myth who attempted to make their way up to heaven?⁸⁰⁸ Men who make such attempts are as far from the truth as their aims are beyond the grasp of human minds and speech, being outside the sphere of this world, based far above the earth and its surroundings, and reckoned among things holy and divine.

had been discovered before her time and were openly bestowed on those men we have mentioned, and adorned their characters, and by means of which domestic and civic affairs were well managed. The other aspect of the Virgin, however, superior to what we have recounted, is entire knowledge,⁸⁵⁷ through which we may search out natural principles⁸⁵⁸ and, as far as lies within our grasp, contemplate the analogies, figures and quantities of the soul and things which are inseparably separable from matter.⁸⁵⁹

51. Let us consider, from a theological and philosophical point of view,⁸⁶⁰ things completely free from matter, a subject which the Greeks,⁸⁶¹ or rather the fathers and patrons of the art, called the first philosophy,⁸⁶² being unaware of any higher kind of contemplation.⁸⁶³ Even this,⁸⁶⁴ although it contains some truth, is as far removed from the vision of God, and as different from converse with Him, as possessing is distinct from knowing.⁸⁶⁵ Saying something about God is not the same as encountering Him.⁸⁶⁶ Speaking of God requires that you pronounce words, and perhaps that you have some skill with them, if you are not just to have knowledge but to make use of it and pass it on. It also requires all sorts of logical reasoning, compelling arguments and worldly examples, all or most of which are gathered by seeing and hearing,⁸⁶⁷ and are the prerogative of people who spend their lives in this world. They may be acquired by the wise men of this present age, even though their lives and souls may not be completely pure.⁸⁶⁸ It is absolutely impossible, however, to truly encounter God unless, in addition to being cleansed, we go outside, or rather, beyond ourselves, leaving behind everything perceptible to our senses, together with our ability to perceive, and being lifted up above thoughts, reason, and every kind of knowledge, above even the mind itself,⁸⁶⁹ and wholly given over to the energy of spiritual perception,⁸⁷⁰ which Solomon calls divine awareness (*cf.* Prov. 2:3–5 Lxx),⁸⁷¹ we attain to that unknowing which lies beyond knowledge,⁸⁷² that is to say, above every kind of much-vaunted philosophy, even though the purpose of the most excellent part of philosophy is knowledge.⁸⁷³

52. Seeking after this – for it is absolutely necessary for ambassadors to meet those to whom they have been sent – the Virgin found that holy stillness was her guide: stillness, in which the mind and the world stand still (*cf.* Ps. 46:10),⁸⁷⁴ forgetfulness of the things below, initiation into the things above, the laying aside of ideas for

something better. This is true activity,⁸⁷⁵ a means of approaching contemplation or, to state it more aptly, the vision of God,⁸⁷⁶ which is the only proof of a soul in good health.⁸⁷⁷ Every other virtue is like healing medicine for the soul's illnesses and the evil passions which have put down roots in it through sloth. Contemplation, by contrast, is the fruit of a healthy soul; it aims to achieve a certain end and is of a kind that deifies; for it is through contemplation that a person is made divine,⁸⁷⁸ not by speculative analogies on the basis of skilful reasoning and observations – perish the thought (for that would be something base and human) – but under the guidance of stillness. Continuing in our life's upper room, as it were, in prayers and supplications night and day (*cf.* Acts 1:13–14), in some way we touch that blessed nature that cannot be touched.⁸⁷⁹

53. Thus those whose hearts have been purified by holy stillness, inasmuch as they have been ineffably permeated by the light that transcends both sense and mind, see God within themselves as in a mirror (*cf.* 2 Cor. 3:18).⁸⁸⁰ The immediate proof of this is the Virgin, who, having kept company with quietness from the earliest age, brings the greatest benefits to us, and commends to God those in need as no one else can. She alone lived in holy quiet from such early childhood in a manner surpassing nature, and she alone of the human race bore the Word, who is the God-man, without knowing man.⁸⁸¹

54. We must, however, return to our subject in order to make this great principle easy for “those who have ears” to grasp (*cf.* Mark 4:23; 7:16). I admire that type of eulogy which benefits the hearers by revealing to them the way of salvation. And even if it is the case that some of the phrases are difficult to understand and cannot easily be comprehended by those whose minds lack concentration, I do not think such words should be banished from the holy precincts; for we do not avoid the narrow way which leads to life simply because it is difficult to follow (*cf.* Matt. 7:14).⁸⁸² Onward then, my brave companions, as many of you as do not prefer easily-earned dust to hard-won gold, and let each of you gather his mind within itself, just as men going along narrow passageways gather up their cloaks, and ascend intently towards the majesty of this thought;⁸⁸³ for there is no accessible means of ascent to so highly exalted a meaning for those who creep along the ground. Once, however, you have lifted your minds above material concerns and resolved to meditate on

and sometimes in weapons, not changing His essence, but fashioning His appearance according to the different circumstances.”

39. Gk. τῷ αὐτεξουσίῳ τῆς ἡμῶν προαιρέσεως. The αὐτεξούσιον is the principle of *self-governance*, *self-determination* or *free will*. By virtue of his endowment with self-governance, the human person is capable of free choice, that is, of determining his mode of existence. Indeed, this is how some of the Fathers of the Church describe the image of God in man, see e.g. St. Maximus the Confessor, *Theological Chapters* I, 11; and St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* II, 12; and cf. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Lord's Prayer* V, and *Homilies on the Song of Songs* II; and St. John Damascene, *On the Two Wills in Christ* 28; and see esp. nn. 330–331 (Hom. XXII, 3), but also Hom. XII, 10, n. 169, n. 214, Hom. XXIX, 8, n. 447, Hom. XLI, 5, n. 626, Hom. LIX, 17, n. 1125, and Hom. LXIII, 1, n. 1206.

40. Notice that the Angel of Great Counsel is none other than the Son and Word of God Himself.

41. Gk. θεανδρική πολιτεία, lit. *the life of the God-man* (cf. n. 221). Christ is one person, the Son and Word of God, existing in two natures, the divine and human: the divine, by virtue of His being consubstantial with the Father; and the human, by virtue of His being made flesh “of the Holy Ghost *and the Virgin Mary*” (Creed of Nicaea–Constantinople, 381: emphasis mine), see esp. Hom. V, 2, n. 48, and cf. nn. 221, 947 and 1047. That is why He is confessed as true and perfect God and true and perfect man (see the *Definition of Faith* of the Council of Chalcedon, 451). The life which Christ lived during His earthly ministry in the flesh, moreover, bears witness to this twofold character. Thus, as St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) taught, Christ conversed with the people, sometimes οἰκονομικῶς, that is to say, *as man*, and sometimes *with divine authority* (μετ’ ἐξουσίας τῆς θεοπρεποῦς), as God (*Letter to Successus Bishop of Diocæsarea* 171, 6). And as a further illustration of this we have the Gospel narrative of the transfiguration in Luke 9:28, where we first see Christ praying, performing, that is, an act which is proper to His human but not to His divine nature; while moments later, we find His humanity sharing in, and indeed resplendent with, His divine glory, which is the natural energy of His divine nature: “The blessed disciples slept for a while, as Christ gave Himself to prayer; for He voluntarily fulfilled His human obligations (τὰ ἀνθρώπινα). Later, on waking, they became beholders (θεωροί) of His most holy and wondrous change”, St. Cyril, *Homily IX on the Transfiguration* (PG 77:1013B). As a result of the “hypostatic union” (ὑποστατική ἔνωσις or ἔνωσις καθ’ ὑπόστασιν) of His two natures, there is in Christ an “exchange of natural properties” (ἀντίδοσις ἰδιωμάτων, Lat. *communicatio idiomatum*), which is why it is also permissible to say that the Son of God was born (cf. *Against Nestorius* 2, and *Letters to Nestorius* 6, 3),

58. St. Gregory's mention of the Mother of God in his concluding doxology serves to underline the fact that the feast of the Meeting is as much a Mariological feast as it is a Dominical one. See n. 47 above.

HOMILY SIX

59. Delivered on Wednesday morning, the First Week in Great Lent (Chrestou, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 18).

60. It is God who willed to bring all things into being, it is He who willed to endow us with His bounties, spiritual as well as physical, and it is to Him, therefore, that all things rightfully belong. St. Irenaeus of Lyons (d. c. 202) says "our way of thinking is in harmony with the eucharist, and conversely the eucharist confirms our way of thinking" (*Against the Heresies* IV, 17, 5). Hence, the Christian way of life is *eucharistic* in character, for in response to all that God has done for us we do nothing more than offer back to Him "what is His own" in thanksgiving and gratitude (18, 5). Everything we have, then, including the virtues, is a gift freely given to us by God. See also Hom. LI, 2, n. 772, and *cf.* Hom. XXXIII, 12, n. 509.

61. The ends never justify the means.

62. Gk. ἀνθρώπω παρέσκεια, *the desire to be pleasing to men* rather than to God, excessive care or concern for how one is regarded by others, instead of how one stands before God; see also Hom. XXXIII, 10.

63. As already indicated (see nn. 22 and 23 above), St. Gregory's cosmology is, broadly speaking, based on an Aristotelian conception of the universe. See also Hom. III, 5 and Hom. XVII, 4–5.

64. See preceding note.

65. Note again (see nn. 26 and 27) that the knowledge which is referred to here is that of God as He "who created, arranged and ordered" all things. In other words, it is not possible to come to a knowledge *about* God, that is to say, a knowledge of *who* God is, by means of the created order. Creation can teach us merely that there must be a God; and even then, only when approached with understanding – a correct disposition.

66. According to St. Gregory, man possesses the image of God more fully even than the angelic powers (see esp. n. 21 above). This is due to the fact that just as God is Trinity – Mind (νοῦς), Word (λόγος) and Spirit (πνεῦμα) – so it is that man's soul alone possesses mind, reason, and a life-giving spirit (πνεῦμα ζωοποιόν), *Natural and Theological Chapters* § 37; *cf.* St. Gregory the Theologian *Oration* XII, 1; for even though angels and archangels, as noetic and reasonable beings, do possess mind and reason, they do not possess a body that is quickened by a life-generating spirit. And although God's image is found

Patriarch Methodius I, c. 843. It is contained, in a revised and updated form, in the Triodion for the First Sunday in Lent (see *ODCC* s.v. “Synodicon”).

92. For the second half of this homily St. Gregory incorporates a part of a confession, which he had submitted to the Church while under persecution, c. 1342, and which he also appended to his *Letter to Dionysius* (Chrestou, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 19; and see *Letter to Dionysius* (Πρὸς Διονύσιον), in the critical edition of Palamas’ works, also edited by Chrestou, *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ Συγγράματα* [*Gregory Palamas: The Writings*], vol. 2, Thessalonica, 1966, pp. 297–299, 494–499).

93. Gk. προβολεύς, *producer, originator* (Lampe, s.v.).

94. Gk. ἐνυπόστατος σοφία, *the Wisdom of God in His very person*. See also nn. 281, 308 and esp. 537 and 1193.

95. See n. 41 above.

96. Although Christ was in no way subject to blameworthy passions (πάθη διὰ βλήτη), that is to say, to those passions which are dependent upon our will (e.g. gluttony, unchastity, avarice, anger, despondency, vainglory, and the like), He voluntarily assumed all our natural and blameless passions (φυσικὰ καὶ ἀδιάβλητα πάθη), including hunger, thirst, tiredness, labour, tears, corruption, His shrinking from death, the agony with the bloody sweat, the succour at the hands of angels because of the infirmity of our nature, and so forth, which, though consequences of the fall, are not in themselves sins (St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* III, 20). See also nn. 208 and 209.

97. As *He Who Is* (ὁ ὄν), God in Himself is incapable of suffering any form of change. But in becoming man, in assuming our created human nature, the second person of the Holy Trinity voluntarily endured corruption (change), suffered, and died (see nn. 41 and 96 above). All of the above, however, as the services of the Orthodox Church continually remind us, must be qualified by the words “in the flesh”, for although Christ, who is true and perfect God, suffered as man, in His human nature, He remained “above suffering and immortal” in His divine nature.

98. Because the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Son and Word of God, really and truly became man, we are able to portray His image by means of created elements. By virtue of the “hypostatic union” of the human nature of Christ with His divine hypostasis (see n. 41) we may represent Him by means of materials taken from the world around us. The “graven images” of the Old Dispensation (Exod. 20:4, Deut. 4:15–19) are thus false images of God, referring to the fact that God in His divinity cannot be likened to any created thing, and cannot therefore be depicted at all. But with the coming of Christ we now have a true image, inasmuch as God has visited His people

107. This of course is based on fourteenth century medical science, the alchemy of St. Gregory's time. But even so, the description given, from a spiritual perspective, is a helpful one.

108. Gk. Παχεία γαστήρ λεπτόν οὐ τίκτει νοῦν: a Greek proverb.

109. Gk. Ἱερουσαλήμ, Heb. יְרוּשָׁלַיִם *Yrúsháláyim*, or יְרוּשָׁלַאִים, *Yrúsháláim*: "Jerusalem . . . is interpreted as the vision of peace", Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* I, 5; "Jerusalem . . . means vision of peace, or raised above death", St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaphyra [= Subtleties] in the Pentateuch*, Gen. 2:3.

110. Gk. ἀρχιμάγειρος, Heb. שַׂר הַטְּבָחִים, *Rabb-Thabbáhim*, or שַׂר הַטְּבָחִים, *Sar Hattabbahim*, originally *head slaughterer, butcher and/or cook* (Lampe, *s.v.*). A reference here to "Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard" (2 Kgs. 25:8) – in the Septuagint, "Naburzadan, the chief cook" – who sacked Jerusalem in 587 BC, which resulted in the Second Deportation of the Israelites to Babylon. "Chief cook", however, is undoubtedly more apropos of the subject in question.

111. Gk. ἐπ' ὀμφαλοῦ γαστρός.

112. Gk. μνήματα τῆς ἐπιθυμίας, lit. *tombs* or *monuments of desire* or *lust*.

113. Cf. *Clementine Homilies* XII, 6 (c. 4th cent.), where St. Peter is described as living only on bread, olives and occasionally vegetables.

114. The practice of fasting varied at different periods in history and in different parts of the Christian world. In Thessalonica, at the time of St. Gregory, as in Constantinople and elsewhere, it was still customary to abstain completely from food until the setting of the sun, when the faithful would partake of a light uncooked meal, usually consisting of bread, olives and vegetables (see Chrestou, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 241, n. 19). See also nn. 71, 117, 166, 180, and cf. 124.

115. Children and the sick are not required to fast. Leniency is also shown to the extremely poor, who, in a certain sense, always fast. See also Hom. XIII, 9, and n. 188 below.

116. St. Gregory is pointing to the fact that, even from a purely physical point of view, the life of the Church is wholesome, and not, as some think, one of self-inflicted flagellation and misery.

117. "Growth" (τὸ θρεπτικόν), the *nutritive* or *vegetative* faculty or power of the soul, which, according to Aristotle (*On the Soul* II, 3), is required for assimilation and reproduction. According to Plato, moreover, "desiring" (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν), the *appetitive* part of the soul, is the source of all negative desires; and the term referred to here as "anger" (τὸ θυμικόν), the *spiritive, insensive* or *irascible* part of the soul, is the seat of the noble emotions, e.g. those of honour, righteous indignation, courage, and the like; and finally we have "reason" (τὸ λογιστικόν), the *intelligent, intellectual* or *rational* part of the

us, but only a humble, simple and good soul and heart". And see also nn. 71, 114, 115, 117 and 166 above.

181. See *e.g.* St. John Cassian, in his "On Control of the Stomach", "stop eating while still hungry and do not continue until you are satisfied" (in *On the Eight Vices*, trans. from *The Philokalia*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 74); and see also St. John Climacus, Step 14: "On Gluttony", in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*: "When sitting at a table laden with food, remember death and judgment, for even so you will only check the passion slightly. In taking drink, do not cease to imagine the vinegar and gall of your Lord. And you will certainly either be temperate, or you will sigh and humble your mind" (*op. cit.*, pp. 101–102); and *cf.* the criterion of St. Silouan the Athonite (1866 – 1938), which goes to the heart of the matter: "It is my belief that one must eat just so much that after a meal one feels like praying – eat in such wise that one's spirit perpetually burns and reaches out insatiable towards God, day and night" (Archimandrite Sophrony, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, *op. cit.*, p. 499).

182. See *e.g.* St. John Climacus, *op. cit.*, p. 99: "Evagrius, afflicted by an evil spirit, imagined himself to be the wisest of the wise both in thought and expression. But he was deceived, poor man, and proved to be the most foolish of fools in this among other things. For he says: 'When our soul desires different foods, then confine it to bread and water.' To prescribe this is like saying to a child: 'Go up the whole ladder in one stride.' And so, rejecting his rule, let us say: When our soul desires different foods, it is demanding what is proper to its nature. Therefore, let us also use cunning against our unscrupulous foe. And unless a very severe conflict is on us, or amends for falls, let us for a while only deny ourselves fattening foods, then heating foods, and only then what makes our food pleasant. If possible, give your stomach satisfying and digestible food, so as to satisfy its insatiable hunger by sufficiency, and so that we may be delivered from excessive desire, as from a scourge, by quick assimilation. If we look into the matter, we shall find that most of the foods which inflate the stomach also excite the body."

183. Gk. ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς κάθαρσις, *the purification of the soul*. In the highly influential writings of St. Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 500), *purification* (κάθαρσις) is the first stage in the Christian's progress towards perfection, which consists in the cleansing of the passions and the cultivation of the virtues (see nn. 106 and 137). The other two stages are, respectively, "illumination" (φωτισμός), and "perfection" (τελείωσις) or "union" (ἕνωσις), otherwise known as "deification" (θέωσις). There are, however, variations to this schema, as in *e.g.* Origen and Evagrius, both of whom refer to the first two stages as the "active life" or "ascetic action" (πρακτική) and "natural contemplation" (φυσική), differing only in the terms they use to denote the third and final stage: Origen, uses the term "spiritual insight" (ἐνοπτική); Evagrius, "theology" (θεολογία); and

XXX, 7, and esp. Homs. XLIII, 7, n. 656, LII, 7, n. 793, and LVII, 9, n. 1079, and LIX, 14, n. 1120.

195. The name “Maria” (Heb. מִרְיָם, *Miryâm*, Gk. Μαριάμ, Μαρία) has been variously explained. For instance, in a spurious work attributed to St. Gregory Thaumaturgus (“the Wonderworker”, c. 213 – c. 270), “Maria” is interpreted as “illumination” or “enlightenment” (φωτισμός), “for what is brighter than the light of virginity”, *Encomium for the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary*, Hom. II (PG 10:1164D); while in another spurious work, this time attributed to St. Epiphanius of Salamis in Cyprus (c. 315 – 403), the author gives the following series of interpretations: “Maria is interpreted as ‘lady’, but also as ‘hope’. For she gave birth to the Lord, Christ, who is the hope of the whole world. And again Maria is interpreted as ‘myrrh’ of the sea; and myrrh speaks, as I believe, of immortality, for she was to give birth to the immortal pearl in the sea, that is to say, in the world . . . and again . . . it is interpreted as ‘illuminating’, since she was enlightened by the Son of God, and in turn enlightened the faithful . . . into [the mystery of] the Trinity”, *Encomium for the Holy Theotokos*, Hom. V (PG 43:488Dff). St. John Damascene, in his *On the Orthodox Faith* IV, 14, gives the same interpretation as St. Gregory: “for this [*sc.* lady (κυρία)] is what the name Maria means” (Lampe, *s.v.* Μαρία).

196. Gk. κεχαριτωμένη, lit. *she who has been filled with grace*, in other words, *she who is already full of grace*, already perfect. See also *e.g.* Hom. LIII, 61, n. 941, and Hom. LVII, 3, n. 1015 below.

197. The Most Holy Mother of God, who was already full of grace at the time of her conception of Christ, meaning that she had already attained to perfection (see preceding note), had therefore also acquired the stability of incorruption, and thus bore Christ “without suffering corruption” (ἀδιαφθόρως τεκοῦσα, from the *Megalynarion*, “More honourable than the cherubim . . .” for the Theotokos), *without suffering change of any kind*; hence her “painless pregnancy”, “the birth without labour”, and the Orthodox confession of her as “ever-virgin”. See also Hom. LIII, 38 and 47.

198. Notice that the “Ancient of days” (ὁ παλαιὸς τῶν ἡμερῶν) is the Son and Word of God in His divine aspect, according to His divine nature, while the designation “Son of man” refers to the same Son and Word of God in His human aspect, according to His human nature.

HOMILY FIFTEEN

199. The liturgical theme for Lazarus Saturday, celebrated on the day before Palm Sunday.

200. St. Gregory is pointing to the fact that the passions are insatiable.

254. The theme of the contemplation of the image of God reflected in the mirror of the soul (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18) is one which had been developed especially by St. Gregory of Nyssa, see e.g. *On Virginity* XI, 5, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* IV and XV, *On the Making of Man* XII, 9; and see also St. Maximus the Confessor, who says that the gnostic men experience the transfiguration of the Word *within* themselves: “and with the transfiguration of the Word within them (ἐν αὐτοῖς), they will see with an unveiled face the glory of the Lord mirrored within themselves” (ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζομένου), *Theological and Economical Chapters* I, 97, and cf. II, 14; and cf. also St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Oration on the Meeting of the Lord* (PG 46:1156D).

255. Gk. κυριακή.

256. The phrase “periods of seven weeks” refers to the feast of Weeks, “held on the 50th day (hence the Greek title ‘Pentecost’) after the offering of the barley-sheaf at the feast of Unleavened Bread” (see Lev. 23:9–21, Deut. 16:9–12); the feast of Trumpets is “kept on the first day of the seventh month (i.e. Tishri = October), the observance of which is ordained in Lev. 23:24 and Num. 29:1”, *ODCC s.v.* “Weeks, Feast of” and “Trumpets, Feast of”, respectively. It is in fact the feast of Tabernacles that refers to “the eighth day” (ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ ὀγδόη) as the ἐξόδιον – lit. *the time of going out* or *departure*, and thus *a commemoration of Exodus* (see also the superscription for Ps. 28) – and also as “holy” (ἁγία).

257. In fact, the literal translation of both Heb. יָוֵם אֶחָד, *yôm eḥād*, and Gk. (Lxx) ἡμέρα μία is *day one*, see Hom. II, 43–44, in the *Hexaëmeron* of St. Basil the Great.

258. Gk. καὶ συμνήφους αὐτοὺς τῆς ἐν οὐρανῷ δεσποτείας ἀπεργασάμενος, lit. *and having made them of the same opinion with His mastery or power in heaven*.

259. Gk. ἱατρῆιον.

260. Gk. ἱερὰ ἱατρεία.

261. Gk. ἀπαθέξ.

262. Gk. καὶ οἷς ἂν θέλη, lit. *to whomsoever* or *to as many as it wills*. See also n. 263.

263. The question of the marks or “symbols” of Christ’s passion on His post-resurrection body is an interesting one as there are two apparently differing points of view among the Fathers on the matter. Firstly, there is widespread agreement that Christ retained the marks on His hands, feet and side up to and including His ascension, see e.g. St. Gregory the Theologian, *Oration on Holy Pascha* XLV, 25; St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies On John* LXXXVII, 1–2; St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentaries On John* 20:19 and 20, and the Second Canon for the feast of the Ascension, by St. Joseph of Thessalonica, 762–832, also known as Joseph the Studite, the younger brother of St. Theodore the Studite, 759–826.

The point on which there seems to be a difference of opinion, however, pertains to the post-ascension glorified body of Christ and, by extension, to the final bodily state of the righteous in the kingdom of heaven. Probably the most explicit statement on the subject is to be found in St. Cyril of Alexandria, who forms the basis of Orthodox Christology, and who maintains that Christ deigned to appear before His disciples still bearing the signs of corruptibility on His hands and side, in order to make it plain, even to the angelic powers (cf. Isa. 63:1), that He had risen with the very same body which was crucified and which He had received from the Holy Virgin. But, Christ retained the wounds on His resurrected body up to and including (but *not* after) the moment of His ascension to the Father, because marks such as these, properly speaking, should no longer have been present on His resurrected and so incorruptible body (see n. 208 above), since, “at the time of the resurrection there will be no remnant of adventitious corruption left in us” (ὅτι κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἀναστάσεως καιρὸν οὐδὲν ἐν ἡμῖν περιλειφθήσεται φθορᾶς τῆς ἐπεισάκτου λείψανον), trans. *A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church*, vol. II: St. John IX–XXI (London, 1885), p. 686; see *Commentaries On John* 20:19 and 20, and esp. 20:26 and 27; and 1 Cor. 15:42–43: “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It [*sc.* the body] is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power”.

Further, St. Cyril’s position appears to be supported by what St. Gregory of Nyssa says in the concluding paragraph of his *Homily On Holy Pascha*, namely, that “it is illogical and a sign of great ignorance if we accept, on the one side, that the characteristics of bodies, which have already decomposed and become corrupt, can appear now on bodies which are born daily, and even that extraneous characteristics appear on other bodies, and then not to acknowledge in like manner that the characteristics which are theirs by nature, and which they once possessed as their own, are renewed and brought back to life” (τὰ δὲ ἴδια καὶ ἐξάίρετα περὶ αὐτῶν τῶν ποτε κεκτημένων ἀνανεοῦσθαι καὶ ἀναβιώσκεσθαι μὴ συνομολογεῖν; found in Metropolitan Hierotheos’ *Life after Death*, Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1999, pp. 244–245 [in Greek]; Eng. trans. Esther Williams, 1996, p. 227). Thus, in the life to come, the bodies of the saints will be “renewed and brought back to life” in incorruption (ἀφθαρσία), that is, without any sign of corruption (φθορά).

However, St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, in his interpretation of the third *troparion* in the abovementioned Canon (which reads: “Why are His garments red who is united to the grossness of the flesh? The holy angels, on seeing Christ, extolled Him who bare the divine symbols of the venerable Passion” [cf. Isa. 63:1]; trans. *The Pentecostarion*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Boston, Mass., 1990), p. 334), makes use of St. Gregory’s analogy of the windows of a house and the wounds of those who have suffered for Christ’s sake as their “adornment”, “beauty” and “glory”, and holds that Christ will come

and Ps. 90:2, and see St. John Damascene, c. 655 – c. 750, *On the Orthodox Faith* II, 1, who, basing himself on the *Hexaëmeron* of St. Basil the Great, c. 330 – 379, Hom. II, 43–44, also gives the different meanings ascribed to the term, adding the helpful phrase that αἰών is “coextensive with things eternal”, συμπαραεκτεινόμενος τοῖς αἰδίοις), and hence only God, who alone is uncreated (ἄκτιστος), may be said to exist “before all ages” and “unto all ages” (πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων καὶ εἰς αἰῶνας), or, as in AV, “from everlasting to everlasting” (Ps. 90:2, Heb. מִלְּפְנֵי עַד עַד מְלָאֵם אֲדָב-וֹלָאֵם, *mē’ôlām ’adb-ôlām*). And while it is true that created reasonable creatures (namely, the angelic powers and human beings) have been brought into being to exist for ever, their perpetuity or eternal existence (αἰωνιότης) has a beginning, is a pure gift from God “by grace” (κατὰ χάριν), and is thus wholly contingent upon Him; whereas God, by contrast, is “eternal” (αἰώνιος), and indeed “pre-eternal” or “sempiternal” (προαιώνιος, αἰδίοις, “by nature” (κατὰ φύσιν); see also Hom. XVI, 7, n. 212.

323. Gk. οὐκ ἀρχόμενος, οὐ παυόμενος.

324. Gk. οὐ γινόμενος, οὐ φθειρόμενος, οὐκ αὐξόμενος, οὐ μειούμενος.

325. Gk. οὐδενὶ τρόπῳ ἢ τόπῳ μεταβαλλόμενος.

326. Gk. ἄναρχος, ἄκτιστος, ἄτρεπτος, ἀσύγκυτος, ἀπεριόριστος.

327. Gk. αὐτὸς πάντα τρέπων ἐπὶ τὸ κρεῖττον ὡς βούλεται, αὐτὸς παραχωρῶν ἐπὶ τὸ χειρὸν τρέπεσθαι τὰ τοῦτο πάσχοντα.

328. Gk. πᾶν δὲ τὸ ἔχον ἀρχήν, καὶ τροπὴν ὑφίσταται, τροπὴ γάρ τις ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐστὶ.

329. Gk. ὄση αἰσθητικὴ καὶ ὄση ἀναίσθητος, ὄση λογικὴ καὶ ὄση ἄλογος.

330. Gk. ἡ λογικὴ μόνη φύσις τὸ αὐτεξούσιον ἔχουσα, see n. 39 (Hom. IV, 8).

331. Our rational human nature possesses *free will* or, more precisely, the principle of *self-governance* (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον), see Hom. IV, 8, n. 39. In other words, free will is a “natural” property (belonging to the nature) of every rational or reasonable being, both angelic and human, created by God. As such, all reasonable creatures have been endowed with the natural capacity to will (τὸ θέλειν). However, how they choose to exercise this power (τὸ πῶς θέλειν), that is, whether they employ their *free will* in a good or evil manner, depends not upon nature but upon the person or hypostasis, since it is the person that determines whether or not it remains in harmony with the will of God [see Hom. XVI, 8, n. 214; cf. Hom. V, 3 and Hom. XXI, 4, n. 312; and *On the Holy Trinity* XX, a spurious but important work found among those of St. Cyril of Alexandria, d. 444 (PG 77:1160D); St. Maximus the Confessor, circa 580 – 662, *Disputation with Pyrrhus* (PG 91:293A), and his *Theological and Polemical Opusculum III: To the Presbyter Marinus of Cyprus* = Chapter 51 of his *On Energies and Wills* (48A and 56B); and St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* III, 18]. Following and remaining steadfast in the will of God is thus

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