

**SERMON (HOMILY) ON:**

**FAST OF LENT IS NOT SUFFICIENT**

*By*

*St. John Chrysostom*

*Concerning the fact that the fast of Lent is not sufficient to make us competent to partake of the Communion, but that holiness is the first things required; how it is possible not to entertain resentment, and that God takes much account of this law; and that the entertaining of resentment punishes those who are guilty of it even before they reach the place of torment.*

**At** length the season moves toward the Lent of the Fast, and, therefore, we ought the more earnestly devote ourselves to holiness. For as in the case of those who run a race, all their circuits will be of no avail if they miss the prize; so neither will any advantage result from these labors and toils of the fast, if we are not able to enjoy the Sacred Table with a good conscience. For this end are fasting and Lent appointed, in addition to many days of solemn assemblies, prayers, and teachings, so that being cleansed by this earnestness in every possible way from the sins which we had contracted during the whole year, we may with spiritual boldness religiously partake of that un-bloody Sacrifice. Should this not be the result, we shall have sustained so much labor entirely in vain, without any profit. Let every one therefore, consider that defect he has corrected, in what respect he has become better. Should he discover he has made any gain by the fast, and be conscious of much care taken of his wounds, let him draw near! But if he has remained negligent, having nothing to show but mere fasting, and has done nothing which is right besides, let him remain outside; then let him enter, when he has purged out all these offences.

Let no one rest merely on the fast; while continuing unreformed in evil practices. For it is probable, that he who omits fasting may obtain pardon, having infirmity of body to plead; but it is impossible that he can have an excuse who has not amended his faults. For no one in offences of envy and hatred is able to take refuge in the plea of bodily infirmity. But since we need to practice all the divine laws alike, and more especially that which bids us consider no man as an enemy, nor retain resentment long, but forthwith to be reconciled. As it is not to be imagined that the fornicator and the blasphemer can partake of the Sacred Table, so it is impossible that he who has an enemy, and bears malice, can enjoy the Holy Communion. For a man who has committed fornication, or adultery may afterwards by manifesting great penitence, obtain some relief. But he who is resentful works the same iniquity every day, and never brings it to an end. In the former case the deed is over, and the sin completed; but here the sin is perpetrated every day. How can you ask your Lord to be mild and merciful to you, when you have been so hard and unforgiving to your fellow-servant?

If your fellow-servant has treated you with contempt perhaps, you have treated God with contempt oftentimes. What comparison is there between a fellow-servant and the Lord? If God chose to search out rigorously what is done against Him, we should not live a single day. What if He were to scrutinize our listlessness and negligence in our prayers, and how, while standing before God and supplicating Him, we do not exhibit even so much fear and reverence for Him as servants do toward their masters, as soldiers do toward their officers, as friends do toward their friends? Thinking that you shall obtain forgiveness, you are often listless; and while your knees are lying on the ground, you suffer your mind to wander everywhere, in the market, or in the house, babbling the while with your mouth vainly and to no purpose! What of the oaths, the lying,

the perjuries, the unjust anger, and of the envy with which you too often regard men when honored? What of the fact that we account the misfortunes of others a consolation for our own distress?

### **Transgressions Exposed on Judgment Day**

For many transgressions, indeed, we have often committed which no other person knows; and when we think, that on Judgment Day these our sins shall be exposed to the eyes of all upon the public theatre of the universe we are in pain beyond any punishment, being choked and strangled by our conscience. Yet there is a possibility of purging away this shame through forgiveness exercised toward our neighbor.

For indeed there is nothing equal to this virtue. It is not said merely, forego wrath; but retain it not in your mind; think not of it; part with all your resentment; do away the sore. For you suppose that you are paying him back the injury; but you are first tormenting yourself, and setting up your rage as an executioner within you in every part, and tearing up your own bowels.

When deathless punishments remain behind, what can be more senseless than the man, who both here and there brings punishment upon himself, while he thinks to be revenged upon his enemy! For, "Rejoice not", He says, "when your enemy stumbles". For what is easier, I ask, than to be rid of resentment against the injurer? Is there any long journey to be undertaken? Is there any expenditure of money? Is the aid of others to be invoked? It suffices only to resolve, and the good deed at once reaches the goal.

For he who comes the first it is who reaps of the fruit; and when at the entreaty of another you lay aside your anger, the good work is to be accounted his; for you have discharged the law as doing a favor to him, not as obeying God. But if, when no one entreats, when not even the man who has done the injury approaches, or solicits you, you yourself dismissing from your thoughts all shame, and all delay, runs forward freely to the injurer, and does quell anger entirely, the good deed becomes wholly your own, and you shall receive all the reward. If I say, "Practice fasting", your plea, perchance, is bodily weakness. If I say, "give to the poor", it is poverty, and bringing up children. If I say, "Make time for the assemblies of the Church", it is worldly cares. If I say, "Give heed to what is spoken, and consider the power of what is taught," It is want of learning. If I say, "Correct another", you say "when counsel is given him, he takes no heed, for I have often spoken, and been scorned". Frigid, as such pretences are, yet you have some pretences of allege.

But suppose I say, "Dismiss your anger", which of these will you then allege? For neither infirmity of body nor poverty, nor lack of culture, nor want of leisure, nor any other thing of that kind have you to advance; but this sin is above all other the most inexcusable. How will you be able to stretch your hands toward heaven, or how to move your tongue, or to ask pardon? For although God be desirous to pardon your sins, you yourself do not suffer Him, while you retain that of your fellow servant!

But suppose that he is cruel, fierce, and savage, and greedy of revenge and retaliation? Why for this reason you ought especially to grant forgiveness. Have you been wronged much, and robbed, and slandered and injured in matters of the first importance; and do you wish to see your enemy punished? Yet even for this, it will be of use to you to pardon him. For suppose that you yourself take vengeance, and prosecute it, either by words, by deeds, by imprecation against the adversary; then God will not afterwards prosecute it too, inasmuch as you have taken your revenge; and not only will He not prosecute the matter for you, but will also demand a penalty of you as a despiser of Himself.

## **Re Reconciled to Your Brother**

Has your neighbor wronged and grieved you, and involved you in a thousand vengeance on your own part, lest you do despite to your Lord! Yield the matter to God, and He will dispose of it much better than you can desire. To you He has given charge simply to pray for the injurer; but how to deal with him, He has ordered you to leave to Himself. Never can you so avenge yourself, as He is prepared to avenge you, if you give place to Him alone, and do not utter imprecations on him who has aggrieved you; but suffer God to be sole arbiter of the sentence. For although we may pardon those who have aggrieved us, although we may be reconciled, although we may pray for them, yet God does not pardon, unless they themselves are converted, and become better. And He withholds pardon, with a view to their own advantage. For He praises you, and approves you for your spiritual wisdom; but visits him, in order that he may not grow worse by your wisdom. The eye that slumbers not has seen your good intention; wherefore, it behooves you to make no account of the opinion of your fellow-servants, when you have gained the opinion of the Judge, Who is about to try your cause.

Do you show all humanity toward your brother; do not pardon his offences in the desire of a greater punishment for him, but of your tenderness and good will; yet understand this very plainly, that the more he shall slight you, while you are laboring to conciliate, so much the greater punishment will he draw down upon himself. Nor tell me, that man has wronged you in this, or in that particular; for if he has displayed, in his conduct toward you, every kind of iniquity that is in man, yet even so God has enjoined you to forgive him all!

Lo! I forewarn, and testify, and proclaim this with a voice that all may hear! "Let no one who has an enemy draw near the Sacred Table, or receive the Lord's Body! Let no one who draws near have an enemy! Have you an enemy! Draw not near! Will you draw near? Be reconciled, and then draw near, and touch the Holy Things!" Nor, indeed, is this my declaration. Rather it is that of the Lord Himself, Who was crucified for us. That He might reconcile you to the Father. He refused not to be sacrificed, and to shed His blood! And are you unwilling to utter a word, or to make the first advance, that you may be reconciled to the fellow-servant?

Hear what the Lord says, concerning those who are in this disposition; "So if you are offering your gift at the Altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, go, first be reconciled to your brother" (Mt. 5:23, 24).

O Transcendent wonder! Does He Himself account it no dishonor, that the gift should be left un-offered, and do you think it a mark of disgrace to go first and be reconciled? And how can such a case, I ask, be deemed worthy of pardon? Were you to see a member of yours cut off, would you not use every exertion so that it might be reunited to the body? This do with regard to your brethren; when you see them cut off from your friendship, make all haste to recover them! Do not wait for them to make the first advance, but press onward, that you may be foremost to receive the prize.

We are commanded to have only one enemy, the devil. With him be you never reconciled! But with a brother, never be at enmity in your heart. And if there should be any narrowness of soul, let it be only an ephemeral thing, and never last beyond a day's space. For, "let not the sun," He says, "go down upon your anger" (Eph. 4:26). For when one day is past, the shame becomes greater; and when the second has arrived, it is still further increased; and if it reach a third, and a fourth day, it will add a fifth. Thus the five become ten; the ten, twenty, and twenty a hundred; and thenceforth the wound may become incurable; for



as time goes on, the breach becomes wider.

### **Make the First Advance to a Brother**

Knowing all these things then, make the first advance to a brother; lay hold of him before he has entirely shrunk away from you; and should it be necessary to run through all the city on the same day; should it be necessary to go beyond the walls, or to take a long journey; still leaving all other things that may be in hand, attend only to this one work of reconciling your brother. For if the work be laborious, reflect that it is for God's sake you undergo all this, and you shall receive sufficient consolation. God bids us to do all these things, and all things should be secondary to His commands. Let us not neglect it. Let our enemy too understand that we have taken much pains, in order to do what is well-pleasing unto God. And though he may again insult, or strike us, or do any other such thing of a still more grievous kind, let us sustain all things courageously, since we are not so much benefiting him thereby, as ourselves. Of all good works, this shall most especially befriend us on Judgment Day. We have sinned and offended in many and great matters, and have provoked our Lord. Through His loving-kindness He has given us this way of reconciliation. Let us, then, not betray their good treasure. Through His great loving-kindness, He has promised us a large and unspeakable reward, and one which we must be especially desirous to obtain, the pardon of our sins; thus also making this our obedience more easy of performance.

If the Emperor had laid down a law that all those who were enemies should be reconciled to one another, or have their heads cut off, should we not every one make haste to a reconciliation with his neighbor? Yes! truly, I think so! What excuse then have we, in not ascribing the same honor to the Lord that we should do to those who are our fellow-servants? For this reason we are commanded to say, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Mt. 6:12). What can be more mild, what more merciful, than this precept! He has made you a judge of the pardon of your own offences! If you forgive few things, He forgives you few! If you forgive many things, He forgives you many! If you pardon from the heart, and sincerely, God in like manner also pardons you!

"For if", says He, "you forgive men their debts, your heavenly Father will forgive your debts" (Mt. 6:14). And as much as the difference between "a hundred pence" and "ten thousand talents" (Mt. 18:24, 28), so great is it between the debts on the one side, and those on the other! If you forgive not men, neither does your heavenly Father forgive you. Think not, therefore, that it is a pious caution not to repeat the whole sentence; nor offer up the Prayer by halves, but as He bade you so pray you, in order that the very obligation of that expression, putting you daily in fear, may compel you to the exercise of forgiveness toward your neighbors.

Do not tell me, "I have besought him many times, I have entreated, I have supplicated, but I have not effected a reconciliation". Never desist till you have reconciled him. For He said not, "Leave your gift, and go your way". Although you may have made many entreaties, yet you must not desist until you have persuaded. God entreats us every day, and we do not hear; yet He does not cease entreating. And do thou then disdain to entreat your fellow-servant. How is it then possible for you ever to be saved? In proportion as the good work is accomplished with greater difficulty, and the reconciliation is one of much labor, so much the greater will be the judgment on him, and so much the brighter will be the crowns of victory for your forbearance.

The making an enemy a friend, will render God propitious and favorable toward us; and will easily set us free from our sins; and gain us praise with men, as well as great security in our life. For where there is enmity and strife, there can

be neither fast nor festival. You would not dare to touch the Holy Sacrifice with unwashed hands, however pressing the necessity might be. Approach not then with an unwashed soul! For this is far worse than the other, and brings a heavier punishment. For nothing so fills the mind with impurity, as anger remaining constantly within it. The spirit of meekness settles not where wrath or passion exists; and when a man is destitute of the Holy Spirit, what hope of salvation shall he have, and how shall he walk aright? Do not then, O beloved, while you are desirous to be revenged of your enemy, cast yourself down headlong; nor cause yourself to be left without the guardianship of God!

### **Befriend Your Enemy**

Let us not then be negligent of what is our life, but let us be in earnest; and do every thing, in order that we may be without an enemy, and so present ourselves at the sacred Table. I beseech you to become teachers of others. Where any precept among those commanded by God requires that it be put in due practice, there is no need of length of time, nor of a multitude of days, nor an interval of years; but of fear only, and reverence of soul; and then we shall be sure to accomplish it, and that in a short time.

For where the fear of God is, there is no need of days, or of an interval of time; as likewise, on the contrary, days are of no service where there is a want of this fear. For just as in the case of rusted implements, he that rubs them only with water, though he spend a long time on them, will not rid them of all that foulness; but he that puts them in a furnace, will make them presently brighter than even those newly fabricated; so too a soul, stained with the rust of sin, if it cleanse itself slightly, and in a negligent way, and be every day repenting, will gain no further advantage. But if it cast itself unto the furnace, as it were, of the fear of God, it will in a very short time purge all away.

Let us not procrastinate till tomorrow. For we “know not what the next day may bring forth;” nor let us say, “we shall conquer this habit by little and little”; since this little and little will never come to an end. Wherefore, dismissing that excuse, we should say, “If we do not reform the practice of swearing today, we will not leave off till we do, though ten thousand things were to press us; though it were necessary to die, or to be punished, or to lose all we have; we will not give the devil the advantage of slackness, not the pretext of delay”. Should God perceive your soul inflamed, and your diligence quickened, then He also Himself will lend His assistance to your reformation!

But this does not suffice for our safety, unless by teaching we amend others, since he who produced the one talent, restoring as he did the whole portion committed to him, was punished because he had not enriched that with which he was entrusted. Wherefore let us not regard this point, that we ourselves have been set free from this sin; but until we have delivered others from it, let us not desist; and let every one offer to God ten friends whom he has corrected; these do you reform. Further, do not make this reply to me, “We have banished swearing for the most part, and we are rarely caught in that snare”. But let even this rarity of offending be gotten rid of. Say to yourself in the first instance; “I must not put a finger to private or public matters until I have rectified this soul of mine”. If you will thus school your own sons, they too will instruct their children in turn and thus this discipline, reaching even to the consummation and appearing of Christ, will bring all that great reward to those who go to the root of the matter. If your son has learned to say, “Believe me;” he will not be able to go up to the theatre, or to enter a tavern, or to spend his time at dice; for that word, lying upon his mouth instead of a bridle, will make him however unwilling feel shame and blush. But if at any time he should appear in these places, it will quickly compel him to retreat.

Suppose some persons laugh. Do you on the other hand weep for their

transgressions! Many also laughed at Noah while he was preparing the ark; but when the flood came, he laughed at them; or rather, the just man never laughed at them at all, but wept and bewailed! When therefore you see persons laughing, reflect that those teeth, that grin now, will one day have to sustain that most dreadful wailing and gnashing, and that they will remember this same laugh on That Day (Judgment) while they are grinding and gnashing! Then thou too shall remember this laugh! How did the rich man laugh at Lazarus! But afterward, when he beheld him in Abraham's bosom, he had nothing left to do but to bewail himself!

### **Speedily Fulfill this Command**

Being mindful then of all these things, be urgent with all, for the speedy fulfillment of the precept. And tell me not, that you will do this by little and little; nor put it off till the morrow, for this tomorrow never finds an end. Forty days of Lent have already passed away. Should the Holy Pascha pass away, I will thenceforward pardon no one, nor employ further admonition, but a commanding authority, and severity not to be despised. For this apology drawn from custom is of no force. Why may not the thief as well plead custom, and get free from punishment? Why may not the murderer and the adulterer? Therefore I protest, and give warning to all, that if, when I have met you in private, and put the matter to the proof (and I will certainly put it to the proof), I detect any who have not corrected this vice, I will inflict punishment upon them, by ordering them to be excluded from the Holy Mysteries; not that they may remain always shut out, but that having reformed themselves, they may thus enter it, and be a partaker of the Communion!

God grant that through the prayers of those who preside over us, as well as all of the saints, having corrected these and all other deficiencies, we may obtain the Kingdom of Heaven through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, honor, and adoration, now and ever, world without end. Amen.