

Translation of the relics of St John Chrysostom

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The Year 403AD was a turbulent time for the saint whose memory we keep today; the saint whose Divine liturgy we offer Sunday by Sunday, John Chrysostom. Today we commemorate the Translation of his relics in the year 438 from Comana in Pontus where he had died in 407, back to Constantinople where he had been archbishop, to be enshrined in the Church of the Apostles.

But there again, all his time in Constantinople was turbulent for St John of Antioch, the golden-mouth, and yes, it was that mouth that had landed him in so much trouble. He was certainly one who dared to speak truth to power; who had condemned moral laxity; who expected the clergy to fulfil their ministry with discipline; who rejected luxury and called on the rich to care for the poor. But it had made him many enemies.

The drama in the year 403 was played out by an emperor, Arcadius, weak, self-indulgent and easily influenced; an empress, Aelia Eudoxia,, superstitious, partly wasteful and eager for power; a Patriarch of Alexandria, Theophilus, worldly, a flatterer, keen to be rid of St John and to have influence over Constantinople; and our saint, uncompromising, popular with the people, given to exaggeration, ready for martyrdom. The scene and the characters are set for a conflict: you couldn't make it up, as they say.

In 403 the Empress Eudoxia had a statue of herself erected outside the cathedral church of the great city. This vanity project together with the feasting and noise that went with it, disturbing the services in the church of the Holy Wisdom itself, soon brought condemnation from St John and the empress took his words personally, as an attack upon her. The final outcome was that, through the plotting of his enemies, John Chrysostom was sent into exile. Eventually, worn down by exposure and ill-treatment on the journey, he died at Comana in Pontus. The last words from the golden mouth were, *'Glory to God for all things. Amen.'*

It would be one-sided to claim that our saint was blameless in all this. He was far from an innocent by-stander, caught up in traumatic events not of his own making. ‘*Saints,*’ as Donald Attwater says in his biography of St John, ‘*are neither impeccable nor infallible.*’ We revere and venerate the saints not because they conform to human ideas of goodness and the canons of political rectitude. We revere and venerate saints because they are holy. Their lives glorified God and their prayers for us before the throne of grace help us to advance along the same path to glory.

Glory itself is a manifestation of God's presence, as far as human beings can perceive it; an energy thrown forth from the Divine essence. All glory, whether of this world or in the heavens belongs, in the end, to God alone, for nothing exists without His being, and every good and splendid thing has God for the very ground of its creation. Moreover, the call of our gospel itself, the good news we proclaim to the world, teaches all that we are made in the Image of God and we are called to share, however imperfectly, in the Divine Glory; that through repentance we can become bearers of the eternal glory of God.

To this end, today's commemoration, invites us to make our own those dying words of the saint, ‘*Glory to God for all things.*’ Not just, of course, at our own departing, but in all that we are and think and say and do. It is a tall order and, no doubt, we shall fail more often than succeed, but let it be our aim, that in all the parts that make up of lives - and certainly in our lives together here, in and through the communion of the Church of the Saints - we may give glory to God. Or rather, let us reflect on earth that glory that is His alone, like so many moons, reflecting onto the earth the glorious light of the sun.

We might well complain that the life in Christ is too hard and our fallings into sin, too common. How can there be saints among modern people? Our lives are too busy; the demands on our time too compelling; our relationships have become over-complicated; and the commandments of Christ so demanding. But the grace of God certainly urges us at least to try! Like the proverbial princess in the fairy tale, you have to kiss a lot of frogs to find your prince.

And so what, if we should fail many times to live lives worthy of that glory, let us keep on repenting until we advance from glory to glory, for that too, our own repentance, glorifies God for His mercy towards us.

Zacchaeus in the gospel today lays aside what the world would consider all the public dignity and self-esteem that belongs to an adult. The little man climbs a Sycamore tree in front of a crowd to see Christ and glorifies God by his repentance. That same Christ, as the epistle to the Hebrews tells us today, has become our High Priest, seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. He has already perfected our stunted humanity. It is for us now to grow up and attain the glory of that New Man, refashioned after the image of Christ. We do that by giving glory to God for all things.

Like the Samaritan leper in the gospel last week, perhaps it is only very few, a tenth of humanity who, knowing the power of God to save us, return and give glory to God in thanksgiving. Indeed, we are of those who come here to ascend, to rise and give thanks.

Whether it be in repentance, in asceticism, in good works or in offering prayers and thanksgiving, we are glorifying God for all things. This very liturgy itself urges us forward. Those outside these walls may see just an old brick building standing here, and we inside, invisible to them. But in reality, we are on the move. 'Again and again' the deacon sings out, calling us to pray without ceasing. 'Lift up your hearts' the priest cries out, and our hearts are to ascend on high, participating in the Liturgy of Heaven itself.

It used to be the case that great buildings and monumental structures often bore the Latin words 'ad maiorem Dei gloriam', usually in the form of the initials, AMDG. It means of, course, *for the greater glory of God*. Such inscriptions were intended to be taken as a mark of humility that, no matter how great human achievements might appear, all our great works in reality reflect the glory of God. In another sense, I am not sure that we can, in fact, add to God's glory for, '*The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness,*' [Ps 23] as the Psalmist says. And, '*The heavens declare the glory of God.*' [Ps.18]

Science teaches us in the First Law of Thermodynamics that the total amount of energy in a closed system cannot be created nor destroyed. We can, though, rearrange things a bit, that's all. So, whatever we do, whether we are boiling a kettle and rearranging energy in the process, or turning from sin to rearrange our lives according to the mind of Christ, let us thereby glorify God in all things and for all things.

George Herbert, the seventeenth century Anglican priest and poet wrote in his poem, *The Elixir*,

*Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee.*

We shall end with the words of St John himself in his 25th Homily on St Matthew's Gospel: *'Let us give thanks to God continually.... He does not need anything of ours, but we stand in need of all things from Him. In point of fact, thanksgiving adds nothing to Him, but it brings us closer to Him.... For this cause Paul also said, Be thankful. For the best preservative of any benefaction is the remembrance of the benefaction, and a continual thanksgiving for it.'*

Glory to God for all things. Amen!