

St. John Chrysostom

Objective

To learn about the life of St. John Chrysostom and his many writings

References

<http://www.chrysostom.org/>

<http://www.ccel.org/c/chrysostom/>

Scriptural Verse

“And the Lord said: Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?” (Luk e 12: 42)

Lesson Outlines

1. His Life

- Chrysostom - “golden mouth”: due to his great oratorical abilities
- Born in 347 AD (some say 344 AD) in Antioch, Syria to a pagan father and Christian mother. His father died when he was young.
- Was prepared for a career in law and impressed his teachers by his eloquence who foresaw in him a statesman and lawgiver.
- He was baptized at the age of 23 and entered a monastery after the death of his mother who had exhorted him to delay monastic life until her departure.
- He spent six years in the monastery and was ordained priest in 386 AD.
- Was elected to the Patriarchate of Constantinople at age 49.
- He taught against excessiveness, lavishness, and corruption, which had permeated every aspect of life including the church. He emptied the Papal residence of expensive and luxurious furniture and sold it for the benefit of the poor and needy.
- His crusade against excessiveness and luxury put him at odds with Empress Eudoxia who ordered his exile twice.
- However he was much loved by his people, who created such an uproar after his first exile, which resulted in his return to his seat.
- He did away with the practice of clapping in church.
- He died in Pontus in 407 during his second exile.

2. His Writings

- St. John wrote numerous lectures and treatises on the Christian and the ascetic way of life.
- He wrote about 600 homilies and commentaries many of them on Scripture and on issues such as marriage, and wealth.
- He delivered many eulogies and sermons at feasts.
- He wrote numerous letters to people who were suffering or who had fallen into sin.
- One liturgy – based on St. Basil’s Liturgy.

3. Examples of his Teachings

“A Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Man who Does Not Injure Himself”

What then is the virtue of man? Not riches that thou shouldest fear poverty: nor health of body that thou shouldest dread sickness, nor the opinion of the public, that thou shouldest view an evil reputation with alarm, nor life simply for its own sake, that death should be terrible to thee: nor liberty that thou shouldest avoid servitude: but carefulness in holding true doctrine, and rectitude in life. Of these things not even the devil himself will be able to rob a man, if he who possesses them guards them with the needful carefulness: and that most malicious and ferocious demon is aware of this. For this cause also he robbed Job of his substance, not to make him poor, but that he might force him into uttering some blasphemous speech; and he tortured his body, not to subject him to infirmity, but to upset the virtue of his soul... For after these things he enjoyed greater confidence inasmuch as he had contended in a more severe contest. Now if he who underwent such sufferings, and this not at the hand of man but at the hand of the devil who is more wicked than all men, sustained no injury, which of those persons who say such and such a man injured and damaged me will have any defense to make in future?

“Homily on Marriage”

The love of husband and wife is the force that welds society together. Men will take up arms and even sacrifice their lives for the sake of this love. St. Paul would not speak so earnestly about this subject without serious reason; why else would he say, Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord? Because when harmony prevails, the children are raised well, the household is kept in order, and neighbors, friends and relatives praise the result. Great benefits, both for families and states, are thus produced. When it is otherwise however, everything is thrown into confusion and turned upside down. When the generals of an army are at peace with each other, everything proceeds in an orderly fashion, and when they are not, everything is in disarray. It is the same here. For the sake of harmony, then, he said, Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord.

Conclusion

St. John Chrysostom is an important teacher of the Orthodox Church. His writings on the Christian way of life serve to edify us and bring us to a clearer understanding of our Christian duty in life and our relationship with God. Many of his writings have been translated to English and have been made readily available to us today.

Activities/Discussion Points

1. Split the class into groups and have each group read and discuss an excerpt of St. John's writings.