

The Church of the Holy Apostles;
A Bible Study on the Book of Acts
Based upon the Homilies of St John Chrysostom (SJC)
Study Guide – January 20, 2016, Acts 19.8-20 - Homily 41

Prayer before reading of the Holy Scriptures: Shine within our hearts, loving Master, the pure light of Your divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our minds that we may comprehend the message of Your Gospel. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed commandments so that, having conquered sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all those things which are pleasing to You. For You, Christ our God, are the light of our souls and bodies, and to You we give glory, together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all holy, good and life giving Spirit, always now and forever and to the ages of ages.

Chapter 19 v. 8-10 *And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*

ἐπαρρησιάζετο? It means, he was ready to confront dangers, and disputed more openly, not veiling the doctrines. Paul put an end to the evil words. SJC “Hence let us also learn not to put ourselves in the way of evil-speaking men, but to depart from them.”

At every turn Paul gives the Jews an opportunity to reject the Gospel rather than casting them out. They are rejecting salvation. SJC “*Mark the infatuated Jewish hardness. Having seen his garments working miracles, they paid no heed to it. What could be greater than this?*”

Paul took advantage of the situation as it presents itself and uses another school to teach.

Paul’s persistence pays off! ALL that dwelt in Asia, Jews AND Greeks heard the Gospel.

Chapter 19 v. 11-20 *Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.*

Paul and the Apostles did greater miracles than Christ – SJC “*Not touched the wearer only (and so were healed), but also receiving them, they laid them upon the sick (and so healed them). (g) He that believes in Me, says Christ, does greater works than those which I do. John 14:12 This, and the miracle of the shadows is what He meant (in those words).*”

Miracles and fear can both bring people to believe, though fear doesn’t last. SJC “*In the case of Sapphira, fear fell upon the Church, and men dared not join themselves to them: here they received handkerchiefs and aprons, and were healed: and after this, then they came confessing their sins.... Did not God last year shake our whole city? Did not all run to baptism? Did not whoremongers and effeminate and corrupt persons leave their dwellings, and the places where they spent their time, and change and become religious? But three days passed, and they returned again to their own proper wickedness. And whence is this? From the excessive laziness.... This, if nothing else, shows that we have natural free-will— our changing all at once. Were evil natural, this would not be: things that are natural and necessary, we cannot change from.*”

The exorcists knew the Gospel “whom Paul preaches” but did not confess Christ. This is why the demons are able to attack them.

Since the exorcists secretly invoke Paul’s reputation (it was a great reputation) the demons PUBLICLY expose their false power. SJC “*Then not the Name does anything, unless it be spoken with faith. (h) See how they used their weapons against themselves! (j) So far were they from thinking Jesus to be anything great: no, they must needs add Paul, as thinking him to be something great.*”

It wasn’t the Name of Jesus that brought the wrath, but the imposture of the men. Even the demons were jealous. Since the crowd saw the fake power of the demons exposed, they turned toward God and confessed selling ALL their VERY VALUABLE books. SJC “*Having seen that there was no more use for them now that the demons themselves do these things.....so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.*”

Teaching on “Fleeing Sin” – (see Homily 41)

1. Sin brings a poor habit

Not this is the only injury we get from sin, that we commit a sin: but another and a worse is this, that our soul receives a habit. Just as it is in the case of the body—for it will be more plain when put in the form of an example—as he who has taken a fever has got harm not only in this respect, that he is sick, but also that after the sickness he has become weaker, even though he may return to health after a long disease: just so in the case of sin, though we may regain health, yet we are far from having the strength we need.

2. Sin is far worse than being possessed by a demon

Why then, in a far worse condition than those who are possessed of evil spirits are we that sin. We do not, indeed, foam at the mouth, nor distort our eyes, or throw about our hands convulsively; but as for this, would that we did it in our body and not in our soul!

3. Sin is not as bad as repressing anger

There is also another form of madness worse than this. What may this be? When men cannot so much as suffer themselves to vent their anger, but instead of that nourish within their own bosoms, to their own proper hurt, as it were a very hangman with his lash, the rancorous remembrance of wrongs. For it is a bane to themselves first, the malice that they bear. To say nothing of the things to come, what torture, think you, must that man undergo in the scourging of his soul, as day by day he looks how he may avenge himself on his enemy? He chastises himself first, and suffers punishment, swelling (with suppressed passion), fighting against himself, setting himself on fire.... What is more grievous than this madness, to be always smarting with pain, and ever swelling and inflamed? For such are the souls of the resentful: when they see him on whom they wish to be revenged, straightway it is as if a blow were struck them.

4. Being overcome by passion is childish

To be overcome by passion, is the mark of a childish understanding, but to overcome it, is a sign of manliness. Why then, not we are the objects of ridicule, when we keep our temper, but they. It is not this that makes men contemptible—not to be conquered by passion: what makes them contemptible is this—to be so afraid of ridicule from without, as on this account to choose to subject one's self to one's besetting passion, and to offend God, and take revenge upon one's self. These things are indeed worthy of ridicule.

Life Application Challenge – (Homily 41) Do not avenge yourself!

The very thing which makes you equal to God—the not avenging yourself—this you think a subject for ridicule!... So ought it be done likewise with regard to anger; both ourselves ought to be emulous not to take revenge, and those who have aggrieved us, emulous to give satisfaction. But perhaps these things also seem to be matter of ridicule: for when that madness is widely prevalent among men, those who keep their temper are laughed at, and among many madmen he who is not a madman seems to be mad. Wherefore I beseech you that we may recover (from this malady), and come to our senses, that becoming pure from this pernicious passion, we may be enabled to attain unto the kingdom of heaven, through the grace and mercy of His only-begotten Son, with Whom to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, honor, now and ever, world without end. Amen.