



In Praise of Ss Peter and Paul

by St. John Chrysostom

(The following selected passages are from St John Chrysostom's final homily on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans).

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." (Romans 16:24)

See how we should begin and end everything? For with this St Paul laid the foundation of his Epistle, and with this he puts on the roof, at once praying for the mother of all good things for the Romans, and calling the whole of his loving-kindness to their mind. For this is the best proof of a generous teacher, to benefit his learners not by word only, but likewise by prayer, which is why it has been said,

"Let us give ourselves continually to prayers, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

Who is there then to pray over us, since Paul has departed?

Those who are the imitators of Paul. Only let us show ourselves worthy of such intercession, that it may not be that we hear Paul's voice here only, but that hereafter, when we are departed, we may be counted worthy to see that great wrestler of Christ. Or rather, if we hear him here, we shall certainly see him hereafter, if not as standing near him, yet see him we certainly shall, glistening near the Throne of the King.

Where the Cherubim sing the glory, where the Seraphim are flying, there shall we see Paul, with Peter, and as a chief and leader of the choir of the Saints, and shall enjoy his generous love. For if when here he loved men so, that when he had the choice of departing and being with Christ, he chose to be here, much more will he there display a warmer affection.

I love Rome for this, although indeed one has other reasons for praising it, both for its greatness, and its antiquity, and its beauty, and its populousness, and for its power, and its wealth, and for its successes in war. But I let all this pass, and esteem it blessed on this account, that both in his lifetime Paul wrote to the Romans, and loved them so, and talked with them while he was with us, and brought his life to a close there. Wherefore the city is more notable for this reason, than for all other reasons combined. And as a body great and strong, it has as two glistening eyes the bodies of these Saints.

Not so bright is the heaven, when the sun sends forth his rays, as is the city of Rome, sending out

these two lights into all parts of the world. From there will Paul be caught up to the heavens, and from there will Peter. Just imagine, and shudder at the thought of what a sight Rome will see, when Paul arises suddenly from the ground, together with Peter, and is lifted up to meet the Lord (1 Thess 4:17). What a rose will Rome send up to Christ! (Isaiah 35:1) What two crowns will the city have about it! What golden chains will she be girded with! What fountains possess!

Therefore I admire the city, not for the much gold, not for the columns, not for the other display there, but for these pillars of the Church (1 Cor 15:38).

Would that it were now given me to throw myself round the body of Paul, and be riveted to the tomb, and to see the dust of that body that filled up that which was lacking after Christ (Col 1:24), that bore the marks of Christ (Gal 6:17), that sowed the Gospel everywhere – yes, the dust of that body in which he ran to and fro everywhere! The dust of that body through which Christ spoke, and the Light shone forth more brilliant than any lightning, and the voice spoke out, more awful than any thunder to the devils! Through which he uttered that blessed voice, saying,

“I could wish that myself were accursed, for my brethren” (Rom 9:3),

through which he spoke before kings, and was not ashamed! (Ps 119:46), through which we come to know not only Paul but also Paul’s Master! Not so awful to us is the thunder, as was that voice to the demons! For if they shuddered at his clothes (Acts 19:12), much more did they at his voice.

This led them away captive, this cleansed out the world, this put a stop to diseases, cast out vice, lifted the truth on high, had Christ riding upon it, and everywhere went about with Him; and what the Cherubim were, this was Paul’s voice, for as He was seated upon those Powers, so was He upon Paul’s tongue. For it had become worthy of receiving Christ, by speaking those things only which were acceptable to Christ, and flying as the Seraphim to height unspeakable! For what is more lofty than that voice which says,

“For I am persuaded that neither Angels, nor Principalities, nor Powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus”? (Rom 8:38-39)

...This is the mouth, the dust of which I so desire to see, through which Christ spoke the great and secret things, and greater than in His own person, ...through which the Spirit gave those wondrous sayings to the world! For what good thing did not that mouth effect? It drove out devils, it loosed sins it, it muzzled tyrants, stopped philosophers’ mouths, brought the world over to God, persuaded savages to learn wisdom, altered the whole order of the earth.

...Nor is it that mouth only, but the heart’s dust I also long to see, which a man would not do wrong to call the heart of the world, and a fountain of countless blessings... For the spirit of life was furnished out of it all, and was distributed through the members of Christ, not as being sent forth by arteries, but by a free choice of good deeds. This heart was so large, as to take in entire cities, and peoples, and nations.

“For my heart,” he says, “is enlarged” (2 Cor 6:11).

Yet the love for others that enlarged his heart was at times a source of pain and anguish for it!

For he says,

“I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart” (2 Cor 2:4).

I long to see, even after its dissolution, that heart which burned for each person lost, ...which saw God,

(for “the pure in heart,” says the Lord himself, “shall see God”) (Mt 5:8);

which became a Sacrifice,

(for “a contrite heart is a sacrifice to God”) (Ps 51:17);

which was loftier than the heavens, which was wider than the world, which was brighter than the sun’s beam, which was warmer than fire, which was stronger than adamant, which sent forth rivers,

(for Scripture says that “rivers of living water shall flow out of the believer’s belly”)
(John 7:38);

in which a fountain sprang up, watering not the face of the earth but the souls of men; from which fountains of tears poured forth day and night. His heart lived the new life, not this life which we now live, for he says,

“I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me” Gal 2:20);

so Paul’s heart was Christ’s heart, and a tablet of the Holy Spirit, and a book of grace.

...I long to see the dust of those hands that were in chains: those hand through which the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon others; through which the divine writings were written.

...I long to see the dust of those eyes which were blinded by glory, which recovered their sight again for the salvation of the world; which even in the body were counted worthy to see Christ, ... which saw the things which are not seen, which saw not sleep, which were watchful at midnight.

I long to see as well the dust of those feet, which ran through the world and were not weary; which were bound in the stocks when the prison shook, which went through parts habitable or uninhabited, which walked on so many journeys.

But why speak of individual parts? I long to see the tomb where the armor of righteousness is laid up, the armor of light, the limbs which... were crucified to the world, which were Christ’s members, which were clothed in Christ, a temple of the Spirit, a holy building, bound in the Spirit, riveted to the fear of God, which had the marks of Christ. This body is a wall to that City [of Rome] which is safer than all its towers, and than thousands of battlements.

And with his body is Peter’s own. For he honored Peter while alive, and went up [to Jerusalem] to see him, (Gal 1:18) and therefore even when departed this life, grace deigned to give them both the resting place.

Let us then, taking all this to heart, stand nobly; for Paul was a man, partaking of the same nature with us, and having everything else in common with us. But because he showed such great love toward Christ, he went up above the Heavens, and stood with the Angels. And so if we too would rouse ourselves up a little, and kindle in ourselves that fire, we shall be able to emulate that holy man. For were this impossible, he himself would never have said,

“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

Let us then not only admire him, or be struck with him, but imitate him, that we too, when we depart from here, may be counted worthy to see him, and to share the unutterable glory unutterable, which God grant that we may all attain to by the grace and love toward man of our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom, and with Whom, be glory to the Father, with the Holy Ghost, now and evermore. Amen.

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