

*Feast of Saint John Chrysostom*

*September 13, 2019*

Whenever we pray the Collect on a Saints Day we concentrate first on an attribute of God, secondly on the virtues embodied in the Saint's life and thirdly how this virtue can inspire us:

Listen again to the Collect with this in mind.

*O God, strength of those who hope in you,*

*The attribute of God – his strength emboldens those who hope in him.*

*Listen now for the virtues in Saint John Chrysostom's life*

*who willed that the Bishop Saint John Chrysostom  
should be illustrious by his wonderful eloquence  
and his experience of suffering,*

*Two things, his wonderful eloquence and hope-filled patience in suffering.*

*grant us, we pray,  
that, instructed by his teachings,  
we may be strengthened through the example  
of his invincible patience.*

*We pray to be strengthened by his example of invincible patience.*

*His eloquence: Golden Mouthed*

From a youth he was a gifted orator so much so that his teacher Libanius, the most famous rhetorician of his day conceded that his student had surpassed him in both eloquence and power of persuasion. The pagan professor only had one misgiving about his student. "It is a pity," he remarked, "that the boy is a Christian— otherwise he could be my successor."

Although set to study law he was influenced by hermits who lived outside the city of Antioch, his birthplace where he had been born around the year 349 and was ordained to the priesthood in 386 at the age of 37. So renowned was he for his homilies the stenographers recorded his words. His commentary on Matthew is the first complete book based on the 1<sup>st</sup> Gospel. We have hundreds of his homilies and commentaries on the epistles of Paul, especially Romans, and on the Gospel of John.

Listen to some of his golden mouthed words:

"If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find Him in the chalice."

"No matter how just your words may be, you ruin everything when you speak with anger."

"For Christians above all men are forbidden to correct the stumblings of sinners by force...it is necessary to make a man better not by force but by persuasion. We neither have authority

granted us by law to restrain sinners, nor, if it were, should we know how to use it, since God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil, not by force, but by choice.”

And this he did patiently and repeatedly especially after becoming the Patriarch of Constantinople in 397

***What about his experience of suffering.***

Story of Arcadius and his wife Eudoxia who gave herself the title “Augusta,” the female form of Augustus. Next, she began wearing the purple vestments of an emperor. Her image even began to appear on coins minted in Constantinople. Everyone knew that this vain woman was now the real power behind the throne

St. John called her out on her abuse of power to the point of being exiled by her husband Arcadius – however the day after being exiled there was an earthquake in Constantinople that Eudoxia thought divine retribution and so had her husband call John back to the City. The favor of the vain empress lasted only a short while. Two months later, she had a silver statue of herself erected directly in front of John’s cathedral. The dedication celebration deteriorated into raucous revelry and disrupted the Divine Liturgy that was taking place inside the cathedral. John could not remain silent in the face of this sacrilege. So a few days later, on the Feast of St. John the Baptist, he thundered from the pulpit: “Again Herodias raves; again she is troubled; she dances again; and again desires to receive John’s head on a platter.” John received a decree from the emperor disbaring him from preaching and celebrating the liturgy. He paid no heed. Next, he was forbidden to even set foot in a church building. He nevertheless continued to carry out his ministry. On Holy Saturday eve the following year as he baptized new Christians at the Easter vigil, troops broke into the church and mixed blood with the baptismal water. The frail old bishop found himself brutally dragged into remote exile in easternmost Turkey. Within a few months, the empress died from complications following childbirth. She was not yet thirty. For the next two years, John, though broken in health, was comforted in his exile by a steady stream of pilgrims who had traveled all the way from Antioch to pay homage to one they considered a living saint. Fearful of John’s influence over these visitors, the emperor in 407 determined to completely isolate him in the remote territory east of the Black Sea. But John’s health finally gave out and he died on the way on September 14<sup>th</sup> 407. His last words were “Glory to God for all things!”

The hapless emperor Arcadius died only a few months after John. Thirty years later, John’s remains were brought back to Constantinople in solemn procession. The new Emperor Theodosius II, son of Eudoxia, laid his head on the casket and begged forgiveness for the sin of his parents. John was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles next to the remains of Saints Andrew, Luke, and Timothy, and Emperor Constantine. Strengthened by the example of his invincible patience. I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service,<sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, 1 Ti 1:12–14). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.