

Homily for Tuesday September 13
24th Week of Ordinary Time

Memorial St. John Chrysostom

1 Corinthians 12:12–14, 27–31a
Psalm 100:1b–5
Luke 7:11–17¹

In today's Gospel Jesus speaks to the widow of Nain's son. A man who was dead, is brought back to life and in response to this miracle the people declare:

"A great prophet has risen among us"

And

"God has looked favourably on his people"

The words of Jesus have authority and change reality. This is not only true in the stories like the one we read here in Luke's Gospel but it is also true of those who in serving Jesus craft words that change and shape the lives of those who hear them.

One of the greatest and most gifted wordsmiths the church has ever know was Bishop John. He lived from 349-407 and was archbishop of Constantinople from 397 til his death in 407. He ended his life in exile because his homilies were too much for the emperor Arcadius and his wife Eudoxia and so they wanted him out of town!

Since his arrival in Constantinople in 397 St. John had been shaking things up with homilies that inspired the common people of Constantinople but unsettled the wealthy. He pointed out that while there were over 100,000 Christians living in Constantinople over 50,000 of them were living in poverty. Listen in on one of his homilies where he challenges the faithful:

Do you want to honor Christ's body? Then do not scorn him in his nakedness, nor honor him here in the church with silken garments while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked. For he who said: This is my body, and made it so by his words, also said: "You saw me hungry and did not feed me, and inasmuch as you did not do it for one of these, the least of my brothers, you did not do it for me" (Matt 25: 34ff)... Let us learn, therefore, to be men of wisdom and to honor Christ as he desires. For a person being honored finds greatest pleasure in the honor he desires, not in the honor we think best. Peter thought he was honoring Christ when he refused to let him wash his feet; but what Peter wanted was not truly an honor, quite the opposite! Give

¹ *Catholic Lectionary*. (2009). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

him the honor prescribed in his law by giving your riches to the poor. For God does not want golden vessels but golden hearts.

His great concern for seeing Jesus in the poor was rooted in his sacramental theology. In another sermon on the Eucharist he wrote:

It is not man who causes what is present to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but Christ Himself who was crucified for us. The priest is the representative when he pronounces those words, but the power and the grace are those of the Lord. "This is my Body," he says. This word changes the things that lie before us; and as that sentence "increase and multiply," once spoken, extends through all time and gives to our nature the power to reproduce itself; even so that saying "This is my Body," once uttered, does at every table in the Churches from that time to the present day, and even till Christ's coming, make the sacrifice complete.

Taking this theme even further he said in a Christmas homily:

"Reflect, O man, what sacrificial flesh you take in your hand! To what table you will approach. Remember that you, though dust and ashes, do receive the Blood and the Body of Christ."

St. John understood what St. Paul in today's Epistle makes abundantly clear. Those who recognize the body of Christ in the Mass – the theme from yesterday's Epistle – will recognize the body of Christ in the Church – a body that is to reach out to those most in need.

Thus he taught his people to invest in lasting treasures:

Do you delight in expensive clothes, or golden jewelry? Remember Paul's bonds, and these things will seem to you as more worthless than a prostitute's filthy rags, or a handful of withered grass. Do you spend long hours adorning your hair, and painting your face with cosmetics, hoping to make yourself beautiful? Think of Paul's squalor in prison, and you will burn with desire for his beauty. You will then consider worldly beauty to be ugly, and will bitterly long to share Paul's chains.

St. John, was a doctor of the Eastern Church and also called a doctor of the Eucharist. Many of his homilies exist to the present day.

Within a century, an epithet was given him that has all but replaced his proper name. Acknowledging him as the greatest popular preacher of the East, it calls him "Chrysostom," meaning "golden-mouthed."

Like his Lord and Saviour St. John's mouth spoke life giving words that raised the spiritually dead to a love for the body of Christ, in the Eucharist, in the Church and in the poor.

In him people exclaimed:

"A great prophet has risen among us"

And

"God has looked favourably on his people"