

Encomium on All Saints - Part II (Saint John Chrysostom)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



[Previous post: <http://bit.ly/2J9X4MQ>]

But let's not merely listen to what's been said, that is that there were hot coals below the wounded bodies, but let's think how we feel when we suddenly come down with a fever. We think that life's unbearable, we're upset, we fret, we gripe like little children, as if the heat of the fever's as bad as that of hell. The martyrs, though, didn't have a fever and even though they were surrounded by flames and the sparks were flying over their wounds and eating into their lacerations more viciously than any wild animal, they were adamant and seemed as if they were watching this happening to other people's bodies. With the bravery and boldness that became them, they remained true to their confession, unmoved by all the tortures and demonstrating for all to see their courage and the grace of God. Have you often seen the dawn, the sun rising and sending out its golden rays? That's

what the bodies of the saints were like: as if golden rays surrounded on all sides the rivulets of blood and made their bodies more radiant than the sun in the sky.



When the angels saw this blood, they rejoiced, the demons feared and the devil himself trembled. It wasn't just blood they saw, but the blood of salvation, holy blood, blood worthy of the heavens, blood that's continually watering the plants of the Church. The devil saw the blood and was horrified, because he remembered other blood, that of the Lord. That blood was the cause of blood being shed now, since, from the time that the Lord's side was pierced, innumerable sides have been pierced. So who wouldn't readily take part in these contests, given that they would then become sharers in the sufferings of the Lord and have the same death as the

death of Christ? Because this response is sufficient, the honour is greater, the reward surpasses the achievements and comes before the advent of the Kingdom of Heaven. So let's not fear when we hear that so-and-so's been martyred, but let's be horrified when we hear that somebody's courage has failed them and they've fallen, when they had such a prize within their grasp.

But if you want to hear what happened later there aren't any words to describe it, because it says: 'No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him'. And nobody has ever loved God as much as the martyrs. Naturally, we won't be silent because the magnitude of the benefits that have been prepared surpasses our words and thoughts, but, insofar as we're able, we'll speak and you'll hear; we'll try to show you even faintly the bliss that awaits them there. Faintly because the only people who can realize it fully are the ones who really experience it. The martyrs underwent those unbearable, harrowing trials for a brief moment in time, and then, after their release from this life, ascended into the heavens, preceded by the angels and flanked by the archangels. The angels aren't ashamed of their fellow-servants, but want to do whatever they can for them, because they chose to suffer so greatly for Christ their Lord.

But when they ascend to heaven, all those holy powers hasten to welcome them. Imagine foreign athletes coming into a city and all the people running to meet them from all over, gathering round them and admiring at first hand the strength of their limbs. Much more so, when the devout athletes ascend into the heavens, the angels and all the heavenly powers hasten to receive them and wonder at their wounds. They welcome and embrace all of them like heroes returning from war and battle, after winning many trophies and victories. Then, a great throng of them bring them before the King of Heaven, on that throne replete with great glory, where there are the cherubim and seraphim. And when they arrive and bow down before Him Who sits upon the throne they enjoy even greater munificence from the Lord than they received from the angels. He doesn't receive them as servants (though this would be an honour the like of which would be impossible to find), but as His friends. 'For you' says the Lord, 'are my friends'. And this is quite right, because He also said "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's soul [life] for one's friends'.

So because they demonstrated the greatest love, this glory awaits them and they enjoy it. They're united with the chorus of the angels and sing their parts in mystical hymns. Now if they took part in this chorus when they had a body, when they partook of the mysteries and sang the Thrice-Holy Hymn with the Cherubim,

as you know yourselves as members of the Church, how much more, now that they're with the angels, do they take part with boldness in that doxology. Weren't they afraid before they were martyred? Don't you now desire martyrdom? Aren't you sorry that it's not the time for martyrdom now? But let's exercise ourselves for the time of martyrdom. They spurned life; you should spurn pleasures. They cast their bodies into the fire, so you should cast your wealth into the hands of the poor. They trod upon burning coals, so you should extinguish the flame of desire within you. These things are troublesome, but they bring their reward. Don't look at the present, which is unpleasant, but look towards the future, which is pleasant. Not the difficulties you're experiencing now, but the benefits you hope for. Not the sufferings but the prizes; not the labours, but the crowns, not the sweat but the reward; not the pain but the recompense; not the burning coals but the kingdom that awaits you; not the executioners all about you, but Christ Who will crown you.

This is the best and easiest way forward towards virtue: for people to see not only their efforts, but also the prizes that accompany the efforts. Not each separately. So when you're giving alms, don't think about the money you're spending, but about acquiring righteousness. 'He has dispersed, he has given to the poor; his righteousness lives until the ages of ages'. Don't look at how your riches are shrinking, but how your treasury's increasing. If you fast, don't think about the discomfort that the fast brings, but about the ease that comes from it. If you keep vigil in prayer, don't think about how weary the vigil is, but about the boldness you'll acquire from the prayer. That's what soldiers do, too. They don't look at the wounds, but the rewards, not at the slaughter, but the victory, not the dead on the field of battle, but the heroes being crowned. In the same way, helmsmen look at the harbour rather than the waves, the merchandise rather than the shipwrecks, the benefits of a completed voyage rather than the hardships of being at sea.

You should do the same. Think what a great thing it is, in the middle of the dark night, when everybody's asleep, as are the wild and domestic animals, when there's total silence, and you alone get up and talk to the Lord of all of us. Is sleep sweet? Nothing's sweeter than prayer. If you talk in private with Him, you'll be able to achieve a great deal, without anyone interrupting you, nor hindering your prayer, and the time's your ally in gaining what you want. But if you squirm around on a soft mattress and are reluctant to get up? Think of the martyrs who today are lying on iron grills, with hot coals spread under them, not a mattress.

I'd like to stop my address here, so that you leave with a vivid and intense image of the grill in your mind, so that you remember it day and night. Even were we confined by countless bonds, we'd be able to break them easily and arise for

prayer if we kept that grill in our minds. Not only the grill but also the other punishments of the martyrs. We should engrave them on our hearts. In the same way that some people adorn their houses, decorating every nook and cranny with beautiful paintings, so let us write the punishments of the martyrs on the walls of our soul. The paintings are a waste, but the punishments are profitable. Writing them doesn't cost money, doesn't involve expenses or any artistic skill. All it needs is for us to use our willingness and our bold, sober thoughts and we'll paint the punishments of the martyrs as if we were master craftsmen.

Let us, then, paint them on our soul: some being cooked alive, others stretched out over burning coals, others being plunged upside down into vats, others drowning in the sea, others being torn to pieces, others being broken on the wheel and others being cast into pits. Others again fighting with wild beasts, others being led to the edge of a cliff, or any of the other ways each one happened to have their life ended. So with this assortment of paintings with which we've decorated our house, we'll make it a fit and proper dwelling for the King of Heaven. If He sees such paintings in our soul, He'll come with His Father and the Holy Spirit and will dwell within us. Our soul will thereafter become a royal palace and no absurd thought will be able to set foot in it, since the memory of the martyrs, like a painting, will always be inside us, shedding illumination, and God, the Lord of all, will dwell within us. Then, having welcomed Christ here, we'll be able, after our departure from the earth, to welcome Him to our eternal home, which I pray we may all reach through the grace and love for humankind of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom, together with His Father and the Holy and Life-Giving Spirit, belongs glory to the ages of ages. Amen.