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The Benefits of Reading the Holy Scriptures, according to Saint John Chrysostom

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Abstract

This paper picks up some of the ideas scattered throughout St. John Chrysostom's writings regarding the benefits the Christian enjoys from reading the Holy Scriptures. The first one is doctrinal and moral guidance; the second one is sanctification and protection against the lure of sin. Thirdly, the Scriptures are cures which help purging the souls of passions. Fourthly, the Great Father emphasizes the infiniteness of the Scriptures' richness and that they must be skilfully interpreted. And, lastly, the Scriptures are the most helpful instrument for understanding the divine Providence and the meaning of the Christian suffering.

Keywords

St. John Chrysostom, Scripture reading

Among the church fathers who shone through their writings in the golden age of the Christian literature, St. John Chrysostom occupies a leading place. Endowed with real literary talent, trained in the art of rhetoric and philosophy at the feet of the greatest pagan teachers of his day, rhetorician Libanius and philosopher Andragatius, young John sees opening wide the

gates of a life in high esteem and pleasures. But God's will was different. The gentle Meletios, bishop of Antioch, imbues him with the spirit of true life, prompting him to wear monastic clothes and receive the grace of the priesthood. Since then, the Scripture becomes a bedside book for him and the most important source of learning for the pastor and his flock. In the following, we will try to outline the conception of St. John Chrysostom about the importance and the benefit of knowing the Scripture for believers and priests.

I. The Holy Scriptures, a guide for faith and life

St. John Chrysostom incessantly recommends his listeners Scripture reading, while showing the great benefits ensued from the Christian's living in close relationship with the holy book. Both the true dogmatic teaching and the right moral principles of life can be found only in the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition. The divine truths written down in the New Testament books are perfect and they remain eternally unchanged.¹ These ones, together with the writings of the Old Testament, through their proclamation of the dogmatic and moral truths, aim to nothing else but the salvation of all people.² Any Christian, who cares for his soul, is called to organize his whole life according to the teachings of Holy Scriptures. Thus, reading it is not only a Christian duty, but even a natural necessity of the human soul. The soul, as the human body, needs daily food proper to his own being³ and - as St. John Chrysostom says - "just as hunger is a sign of the body's welfare, so the love for spiritual words is a sign of soul health."⁴ The Holy Scripture is of great benefit for the Christian, provided that its reading is in line with the purpose for which it was written.⁵ Reading Scripture without perfecting our religious knowledge and reforming our way of life is not only an unnecessary, but even a harmful toil.⁶ This

¹ *Demonstration to Jews and Greeks that Christ is God*, XII, PG 48, 821-822.

² *Homilies on Genesis*, XII, PG 53, 102; *Homilies on Matthew*, III, PG 57, 35; *Homilies on Acts*, PG 53, 226-227.

³ *Homilies on Genesis*, XI, PG 53, 90.

⁴ *Homilies on Isaiah*, II, PG 56, 107.

⁵ *On Fasting and Almsgiving*, PG 48, 1059.

⁶ *Homilies on John*, LXVI, PG 59, 369; *Homilies on Genesis*, XIII, PG 53, 110; *Homilies on John*, LIII, PG 59, 295.

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truth preached by the Lord Jesus Christ is stated in the beautiful words of the Apostle Paul, who wrote:

“Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth — you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?” (Romans 2, 17-23)

They’re wrong all those who think there can be true wisdom apart from the revealed teaching. From their way of thinking and living we soon see that they resemble rudderless ships, carried by the wind and waves at random.⁷ Completely different is the Christians’ life bearing in their souls the words of Holy Scripture. That’s because reading the Holy Scriptures, St. John Chrysostom says,

“makes the soul wise, elevates mind to heaven, makes man pleasing, causes him not to be afraid of anything in the present and our consciences to continually live up there; it prompts us to perform everything looking at the Lord’s reward and dedicate ourselves fervently to virtuous deeds.”⁸

By reading the Holy Scriptures, Chrysostom writes elsewhere, the tongue stops speaking wicked words and the soul wings and raises being touched by the sun of righteousness; the soul, freed from the evil thoughts, lives in great peace and serenity. For Scripture reading is spiritual food; it stimulates reason, makes heart strong and wise; not letting itself grasped by noxious passions, it elevates to heaven with its light wings.⁹

In this way the soul comes close to God. Scripture is the gate through which man penetrates into the sphere of the divine; Scripture provides man

⁷ *On Remembering the Martyrs*, PG 52, 833.

⁸ *Homilies on Genesis*, XXXV, PG 53, 321.

⁹ *Homilies on Genesis*, XXIX, PG 53, 262.

with the key to knowing God¹⁰ because reading the Holy Scripture is nothing else than speaking with God.¹¹ In this way, man acquires knowledge of the divine mysteries, remembers the virtue of the righteous, understands how great God's goodness is and how many the rewards He gives to those who love Him are.¹²

II. A help for salvation available to all Christians

Because of the weakness of human nature not everyone who reads the Bible understands the truths it comprises. This may be one of the reasons that causes many to give up on reading the holy books. St. John Chrysostom stood against such a hasty decision. It is impossible, he says¹³, for someone not to understand anything contained in the Holy Scriptures. Holy Spirit appointed tax-collectors and fishermen, tentmakers and shepards to write these books in order to be easily understood even by simple people.

Pagan philosophers and writers sought through their works admiration from readers, disconsidering their benefit. On the contrary, the apostles and prophets, inspired by the Holy Spirit, proclaimed in writing only the truths necessary to man's salvation. As true teachers of the world, they wrote in such a way that their books be helpful to everyone. Every Christian, convinced of this truth, has the duty to read the holy books full of confidence. And even if, because of human weakness, he understands only few truths from the Scripture, he must not stop reading them¹⁴, because from just the simple contact with holy books he acquires "much holiness"¹⁵. For as the devil does not dare enter a house where the gospel stands, all the more he will not approach the soul that has the words of the Bible, nor will he control the man through sin.¹⁶

"Sanctify your soul and sanctify your body continually keeping these in your heart and on your tongue. For if speaking shameful

¹⁰ *Homilies on John*, LIX, PG 59, 323-324.

¹¹ *That Scripture Reading is Beneficial*, PG 51, 89.

¹² *Homilies on Genesis*, XXXV, PG 53, 321.

¹³ *On the Rich Man and Lazarus*, III, PG 48, 994.

¹⁴ *Homilies on Genesis*, XXXV, PG 53, 321.

¹⁵ *On the Rich Man and Lazarus*, III, PG 48, 994.

¹⁶ *Homilies on John*, III, PG 59, 38.

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things produces defilement and calls demons, spiritual reading sanctifies and brings the grace of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷

By not speaking anything superfluously and living in incessant contact with the contents of the Holy Scripture, our mind and language are strengthened and are spared of sins, because the holy reading is a stronger shield than diamond.¹⁸ St. John Chrysostom says that in the house where “spiritual” books exist, any evil action is powerless, while virtue is easily practiced by those who live there. Sometimes the mere sight of the holy books stops us from sin. And if outside the house we committed forbidden deeds, coming home we repent and decide to stop sinning. We detach from worldly things just by seeing the gospel and by touching it the thought straightens. And if we read it carefully, the soul feels like entering a temple full of mysteries, it cleanses itself, becomes better, for through the sacred writings it speaks with God.¹⁹ It should be made clear that the inspired writings of the Old and New Testament are holy, they have the gift of holiness, but they do not transmit it automatically to the place where they are. Holiness can be bestowed on Scripture’s readers only by direct contact between soul and the Scripture’s contents.²⁰

III. Cures for the soul

Often in his homilies, St. John Chrysostom calls the Holy Scriptures spiritual cures that heal all the sins of the human soul.²¹ We need these cures for healing the wounds inflicted on us by our past sins and for preventing us from sinning further.²² Through continuous reading all the demonic promptings to sin are radically destroyed and the desire to live in virtue flourishes in the Christian’s soul.

“The holy words are a treasure of cures. Thus, if someone needs to take heart, to water down a lust, to trample the love of wealth, not to feel pain, to regain good mood, to practice patience, he will find great support in them. For who among those who long

¹⁷ *Homilies on John*, XXII, PG 59, 187.

¹⁸ *Commentaries on Psalms*, CXL, PG 55, 434.

¹⁹ *On the Rich Man and Lazarus*, III, PG 48, 993.

²⁰ *Against the Jews*, I, PG 48, 851; *Against the Jews*, III, PG 48, 914.

²¹ *Homilies on Genesis*, XII, PG 53, 104.

²² *On the Rich Man and Lazarus*, III, PG 48, 993.

struggle with poverty or gripped by a serious illness, reading the suitable text, will not gain great comfort?"²³

St. John Chrysostom, an expert in the human soul, finds in Scripture healing cures for all evils. In his homilies and speeches we can find all sorts of exhortations.

"The word, he says, is addressed to all, a common cure available to all those who need it; it falls each listener to take what is proper to his own suffering. I do not know the sick, I do not know the healthy. Therefore, I use every word to cure all passions: now condemning gluttony, then pleasure, then referring to debauchery, last offering praise and exhortation to charity, then talking about the good deeds of every man."²⁴

Pursuing real benefit for all believers from reading the Scripture, St. John Chrysostom shows concretely how each person can gain healing from sin.²⁵

In the Holy Scriptures there are all sorts of moral teachings, because they are meant to benefit all men and meet everyone's needs.²⁶ St. John Chrysostom compares the Scripture to a garden, in which the virtues of the righteous are flowers that delight the reader with their perfume.²⁷ Its reading resembles a lake unruffled by waves, a strong wall, a tower that does not move, a splendor that cannot be diminished, an invincible weapon, everlasting joy and endless pleasure.

"It removes discouragement and keeps good mood, it makes the poor richer than the rich and protects the rich from all evils, it makes the sinner righteous and puts the righteous in safe shelter, it pulls out evil, removes malice, heads everyone towards virtue; it not only brings back the good, but even roots it and makes it permanent, because it is a spiritual cure, a divine and mysterious song, destructive of passions."²⁸

²³ *Homilies on John*, XXXVII, PG 59, 207.

²⁴ *Homilies on John*, XXIII, PG 59, 138.

²⁵ *Homilies on Acts*, XXIX, PG 60, 219; *Homilies on Genesis*, XXI, PG 53, 183.

²⁶ *Homilies on John*, XXIII, PG 59, 138; *Homilies on Matthew*, XXXII, PG 57, 39.

²⁷ *Homilies on Genesis*, XLIII, PG 54, 395.

²⁸ *Commentaries on Psalms*, XLVIII, PG 55, 513.

IV. An infinite treasure that should be skillfully used

Scripture resembles a guitar²⁹ that in the hands of an artist makes sounds that elevate and rejoice the soul, while the sounds produced at the touching of the clumsy fingers saddens the listeners. So happens with the holy writings: many read, but not all get a benefit, not all harvest a crop; because they do not persist in reading them, or they do not know how to use them. Thus, both the ignorance and the misunderstanding of the Scripture produce more harm than good.

“Ignorance of the Scriptures is a great evil; because those which should be useful are harmful. So, many times, drugs endowed by nature with healing properties destroy and lead to perdition those who use them incorrectly. We also have weapons that can protect us; but if we do not know how to handle them, we might be destroyed by them.”³⁰

The sacred words are spiritual weapons, but of no avail if we do not know how to use them.³¹ Obviously, not because of the weakness of the weapons, but because of people’s lack in skill. If we do not read the holy books properly, despite the high truths that it contains, we won’t improve our condition, but will fall further instead. Unfortunately, many heresies and sins originate in the ignorance of the content of the Holy Scripture, and especially in its erroneous interpretation.³² For this reason, St. John Chrysostom urges priests to guide the reader, explaining him the Scripture, and he recommends them to read the holy books carefully. This way, the danger of falling into mistakes is removed, Scripture remaining, as it should be, a book of eternal doctrine.³³

The Christian must conduct his life by the principles taught in the holy books, for only thus these will correspond to their purposes. “For this reason we teach the Scriptures, Chrysostom says, not only for you to learn, but to improve your morals. If this does not happen, we read in vain, in vain we explain.”³⁴

²⁹ *On the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant*, PG 51, 18.

³⁰ *Homilies on Acts*, XXXIX, PG 60, 250.

³¹ *Homilies on John*, XXX, PG 59, 174.

³² *On the Holy Hieromartyr Focas*, PG 50, 703.

³³ *Homilies on Genesis*, XLV, PG 54, 414.

³⁴ *On the Obscurity of the Prophecies*, PG 56, 186.

The historical books were written for didactic purposes as well.³⁵ The holy authors report the good deeds of the righteous and the evil deeds of the wicked; after reading about the former, Christians ought to do the same and when hearing of the latter, they should avoid doing likewise lest they suffer the same punishments. There are countless examples in Scripture of virtuous life:

“One shone through poverty, another one through riches: Elijah through poverty, Abraham through riches; just follow the path you find easier and suitable. Again, one through marriage, the other through virginity: Abraham through marriage, Elijah through virginity; go the way you want, for each of them leads to heaven. One by fasting: John, another without fasting: Job. He also had to take care of the children, daughters and house and he possessed much wealth; the other one had nothing apart from his camel hair garment. (...) David shone in kingship; porphyry and tiara did not hurt him; another one was entrusted with the protection of an entire people - I speak of Moses - which is even more difficult. This power was greater and consequently brought about more difficulty. You have seen those who were distinguished by wealth, and those in poverty, those in marriage, and those in virginity; but look on those who have perished through marriage and virginity, wealth and poverty as well. Through marriage many people have perished, as Samson; but not because of marriage, but because of his will; through virginity: the five virgins, through wealth: the rich who looked down on Lazarus; through poverty: countless are those who are perishing today (...)”³⁶

Many other things are found in the Holy Scripture; their contents are endless.³⁷ We take from them only what is beneficial and as much as our human capacities allow.³⁸

“Great are the riches of this treasure and the abundance of waters of this spiritual fountain, says St. John Chrysostom. Do not wonder at our labours in this field; our ancestors, according to their power, drew water out of there, and our descendants will

³⁵ *Homilies on Matthew*, III, PG 57, 35.

³⁶ *Homilies On Philipians*, XII, PG 62, 273-274.

³⁷ *About Prayer*, PG 50, 781-782.

³⁸ *Homilies on Genesis*, III, PG 53, 32.

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try again to do the same, but they will not be able to empty it; the springs broaden and they give plenty of water. Such is the nature of the spiritual springs; the more one will want to draw out water in abundance, the more it springs and brings about spiritual grace.”

By approaching the Scripture from this perspective, we fully understand why St. John Chrysostom once said: “a haven of joy is to read the sacred Scriptures; and this paradise of joy is better than the other paradise.”³⁹

V. Revelation of divine Providence

The Holy Scripture, which Saint John knew so well, offered him patience and consolation (Romans 15, 4) in the difficulties he had to face throughout his life. A complicated ramification of personal, political, and religious factors triggered about his expulsion from Constantinople, at the orders of Emperor Arcadius, in 404. He spent the next three years, until his death, in 407, in the city of Cucuz, in isolation and extremely harsh conditions. Here, while Saint John was bringing to an end his worldly pilgrimage, his years of meditation, exegesis and sermon fruited once again.

In these last years of his life, Chrysostom wrote his last work treating the topic of divine providence, an extensive biblical, theological and spiritual analysis of the pain experienced in their lives by the faithful Christians. This treaty shows how St. John read the Scripture and applied its teaching to understand his own suffering.

The work is addressed to the Christians of Constantinople, “To those outraged by the injustices, persecution and scattering of people and many priests.”⁴⁰ Chrysostom fears that his spiritual children will be affected by his own problems, that might bring them suffering. To avoid this undesirable situation, St. John begins analyzing in detail how God’s providential care is not absent even from the greatest misfortunes of life. His method is to prepare “the cure of the word” which

“feeds more than bread, heals better than any cure, burns more intensely than the fire, not producing any pain and retaining the

³⁹ *That Scripture Reading is Beneficial*, PG 51, 87.

⁴⁰ This is the title of this work in PG 52, 464-513.

reeking runoff of the evil thoughts, cuts painlessly and sharper than iron the infected parts, and in doing so it does not cause any expense, nor increases the level of poverty.”⁴¹

Space allows only a brief overview of how Chrysostom used Scripture to support his ideas. Repeatedly, St. John assures us that although we experience human and Christian suffering, the only eternal harm comes from sin. The Great Father reminds his readers about the numerous biblical characters who suffered unjustly, unexpectedly and inexplicably. Abel is killed by his brother. Jacob lives in famine and in exile. Joseph suffers defamation, slavery and prisonship. Moses endures continuous rebellion and Israel’s rejection. Devil attacks Job with his many temptations. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel are put to death in Babylon. Elijah lives in poverty as a fugitive. David suffers from Saul and the latter is attacked by his own son. Herod beheads John the Baptist.⁴² And yet, Chrysostom asks, did these biblical characters suffer eternal loss by their hardships? Sorrow and pain were present in each one’s life, but they all escaped evil. The martyrs of the Church illustrate this truth. St. John asks: “But the martyrs who gave their souls in excruciating pains? Did they not all look rather brilliantly when they were reviled, when they suffered conspiracies, when enduring the last ordeals they stood nobly?”⁴³ Chrysostom claims that the Gospel of Christ has absorbed all the poison from the Christians’ suffering. Suffering overcomes evil, says St. John, through the cross of Christ.

Nobody is exempt from suffering in this life; Christian, however, must judge this reality in the light of the earthly life and work of Savior Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ must define our attitude in face of adversities we experience. St. John says that it depends on each one whether he/she will benefit or be hurt by the sufferings of life. It does not depend on the nature of pain, but on the stand of our own minds.

The Great Father neither ignored nor minimized the reality of human pain and suffering. He knew very well that suffering brings about pain and sorrow, and never tried to hide this. In his letters to the deaconess Olympias, condemned to exile as well, he writes about his sufferings in Cucuz:

⁴¹ *To those outraged by the injustices, persecution and scattering of people and many priests*, PG 52, 464-465.

⁴² *To those outraged...*, ch.XVII, PG 52, 503-504.

⁴³ *To those outraged...*, ch.XIX, PG 52, 505.

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“Because winter is harsher than usually, it has brought us even more severe storm in our stomachs and we have spent these two months not better, but worse than even dead. For I was alive enough to feel terribly all the things that surrounded me on all sides, and everything was dark: day and dawn and midday, and I was nailed to bed all day. While we have tried thousands of methods, I could not shake off the injury coming from cold. Although I was always rekindling the fire and enduring a terrible smoke, closing myself in one room and having on me thousands of clothes and not daring to push my foot out, I suffered the pangs of death, vomiting continuously, undergoing headaches, lack of appetite and incessant insomnia.”⁴⁴

Besides talking about his own suffering, St. John advises diligently Olympias to take care of her health, being aware of the oppressive nature of illness and its tendency to consume the spiritual strength:

“Therefore I beg you to take great care to straighten your bodily health. For depression brings also disease. But when the body is tormented and weakened completely and lying in a long neglect, and does not enjoy neither doctors nor good temperature of air nor the abundance of those needed, think that from here the terrible occurrences multiply.”⁴⁵

The correspondence with Olympias demonstrates very well that Saint John is aware of the fragility of human condition and shows sensitivity to the relationship between the physical and spiritual health. The same understanding is also present in the advice he gives to those in suffering.

On the other hand, the great teacher does not hesitate to talk about the valuable lessons that can be learned from the confrontation with death and the attitude of faith that a Christian must have when facing it:

“Man is born to die. Why being annoyed for what happens naturally? Do you complain for having to eat in order to live? Do you want to live without eating? Do the same in regard to death: You were born mortal (Hebrews 9, 27); do not ask to be immortal down here. It is appointed for men to die sometime. So be not grieved, nor troubled, but accept a law that is fixed and unchanging for all people.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Letters to Olympias*, Lett. III, PG 52, 552.

⁴⁵ *Letters to Olympias*, Lett. II, PG 52, 535.

⁴⁶ *Homilies on John*, LXII, PG 59, 375.

At the same time, St. John is well aware of the pain of separation that death brings to those who remain, and he recognizes that pain is a natural response of human nature. For example, in his homilies on the letters to the Corinthians, John weighs both aspects of the problem in his discussion of Job's grief caused by the loss of his children. "If he tore his clothes and he had his hair cut, do not wonder, because he was a father of sons and still a loving one, and therefore the grief of his human nature had to be expressed on this occasion." Self-control without any trace of compassion and sorrow for the loss of children could be interpreted as "sheer callousness". Therefore, he shows us both the fatherly pain and the accuracy of piety without being overcome by sadness.⁴⁷ Chrysostom claims that when in pain the Christian must remember the gospel's truths, but he also recognizes that tears are quite suitable both for those who are suffering and for those who are near them.

In his homilies to the Romans, St. John emphasizes the importance of identifying with those suffering. "Because nothing else strengthens the love between people so much as the fact of sharing together our joys and sorrows. So if you are far away from evil and trouble, you must not run out of sympathy for the distressed."⁴⁸

Reading the Scriptures enables St. John to grasp the important distinction between the general phenomenon of suffering and the harmful suffering. All Christians expect to suffer. In fact, Christian life and suffering go hand in hand. But once a person has absorbed the realities of the gospel, the harmful and permanent effects of suffering are wiped off. And consequently comes the spiritual growth.

"Suffering thousands of evils is our life, it is the natural consequence of apostolic life. «We are destined for them», he says. What does «We are destined for them» mean? As goods are offered for sale, so the apostolic life is offered for shame and suffering evil, so that you cannot catch your breath nor have any relief. But those who are vigilant are not only unharmed by these, but have a greater benefit."⁴⁹

Suffering becomes harmful when people come to see the things morally indifferent as the true evils, or when one voluntarily violates God's

⁴⁷ *Homilies on I Corinthians*, XXVIII, PG 61, 256.

⁴⁸ *Homilies on Romans*, XXII, PG 60, 680.

⁴⁹ *To those outraged...*, ch.XX, PG 52, 507-508.

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moral order. Thus, for Chrysostom, sin and evil are intrinsically linked. A conclusive illustration of this concept is King Herod Antipas, the murderer of John the Baptist. Even though John the Baptist is beheaded, Herod is the one who reaps the bitter harvest of sin. Chrysostom invites his readers to imagine Herod's sufferings caused by John's admonitions for his sins. Immediately after the execution of John, Herod's conscience is shaken so hard "that he thought [John] rose from the dead and performed miracles".⁵⁰ Finally, Herod is rebuked for eternity, while John is crowned for his faith. "So do not ask: «Why was he allowed to die?» What he experienced was not death, but a crown, not an end, but the beginning of a better life."⁵¹

By bringing reality in the light of the Cross, St. John understands that evil and sin can never have the last word for those who follow Christ. But the way people see the Cross is diverse. The great Antiochian Father depicts the scene of Christ's crucifixion. The same view is seen by the onlooking crowd and the good thief. But the crowd was deluded and become wicked and mocking, while the thief confesses the crucified One as God. Therefore those who were scandalized because of the Cross have no word of defense.

"For all these are accused by the thief. For he saw Him crucified, and not only was he not scandalized, but he found here a greater foundation of love and wisdom, surpassing all human things and, relieved by the wing of faith, thought with love of wisdom about those that were to come."⁵²

What were the elements that determined the subtle answer of the thief on the cross? St. John responds that, firstly, the thief never wanted to enter the realm of human speculation. This means that he resisted the temptation to understand the ineffable. Secondly, his incipient faith allowed him to look beyond the immediate situation. Wider considerations, including hope for the future, determined his response to the apparent defeat and death of the Son. As St. John says, "he thought with love of wisdom about Resurrection". His attentive and submissive mood before the great works of God allowed him to understand the situation correctly. By comparison, those in the crowd are "mindless and careless", missing the blessings of the Cross. Their understanding is based only on appearances. They are not

⁵⁰ *To those outraged...*, ch.XXII, PG 52, 510.

⁵¹ *To those outraged...*, ch.XXII, PG 52, 510-511.

⁵² *To those outraged...*, ch.XIV, PG 52, 500.

able to see the true significance of events. Only those with vigil and sober mind can understand the works of God.

Thus, Scripture becomes the lens through which St. John looks at the sufferings of life, including his own situation in exile. He urges the believers in Constantinople to think and live in a Christian way. If they do so, they will overcome the evil inside the troubles and will enjoy great advantages. The truth of the Gospel is the most important factor in the correct understanding of the divine Providence. Worldly people, grudging, obstinate and fleshly will always be wrong in interpreting God's providence, because their minds are not shaped by the Gospel. Scripture interpretation and understanding of life are, in the thinking of St. John Chrysostom, inseparable.

VI. Conclusions

Guiding the believers to understand the contents of the holy books is one of the greatest pastoral ideals of St. John Chrysostom. He dedicated most of his life explaining the Holy Scriptures from the pulpit. He did not forget for a moment that he was a pastor of souls and one of his principal duties was to preach the truths contained in the holy books. For this reason he did not write scientific commentaries; he interprets the Scripture in preaching, creating homilies for the practical necessities of the faithful.

His argument sometimes rests on the cold laws of a healthy logic, but the ultimate test is the word of the Holy Scripture. Although St. John Chrysostom has all the gifts of a dialectician, his soul remains continually driven by faith. As a great teacher, in order to convince his listeners he addresses the heart more than the reason. Therefore, his warm words captivate, trigger action, exerting an irresistible power over the human soul.

Scripture is for St. John Chrysostom an infinite wellspring of moral teachings. Preaching these teachings is, in his thinking, the main work of the interpreter of the holy books. All the rules of the Christian life are there, in the words inspired by the Holy Spirit. None other has ever known better than him to apply to everyday circumstances the richness of moral teachings contained in the Old and New Testament. He lived intensely the teaching of Holy Scripture, because there he found the key to the kingdom of heaven.

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“St. John Chrysostom practices the cult of books inspired by God; He venerates the Scripture. Cleansing his conscience, he takes it in his hands with respect; opening the eyes of the soul, he reads it with devotion; prompted by an ardent faith, he explains it in fear of God.”⁵³

⁵³ Patriarhul Iustin, *Sfânta Scriptură și interpretarea ei în opera Sfântului Ioan Hrisostom*, București: Editura Anastasia, 2003, p. 183.