

BOOK REVIEWS

Blessed Jerome, *Homilies on the Gospel of Mark. Various Homilies*, translation from Latin, introduction and notes by Alin-Bogdan Mihăilescu, Bible Institute and Orthodox Mission Publisher, Bucharest, 2014, 199 p.

Homilies on the Gospel of Mark. Various Homilies entitled volume printed with the blessing of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel in the *Orthodox Faith* collection represents a further step in the translation of Jerome's work into Romanian. The two series of homilies are preceded by a brief editorial note, an introduction and two synopses.

The editorial note highlights the rich homiletic and pastoral activity of Blessed Jerome over the almost thirty five years at Bethlehem (386-420), the catechetical purpose of the homilies and their careful delineation of heterodox interpretations (p. 5-6).

The introduction is a remarkable study of the translator on the meaning, context and hermeneutical ideas in the *Homilies on the Gospel of Mark* and *Various Homilies*, and not least, about the limits of biblical interpretation in Jerome's vision reflected in the same homilies. Concerning the importance of the homilies, the translator underlines their importance, although they have not passed the filter of Blessed Jerome's revision. The homilies witness many of Jerome's life aspects and thinking. Along with Blessed Jerome's great writings, they bring forth a sharp portrait of the Latin Father. In a spontaneous portrait they merge his two hypostasis: exeget and shepherd of believer's souls. In respect to exegesis, the value of the homilies emerges from their complementary character, dogmatic dimension and Bible's interpretation rules (p. 7-10).

Regarding the homilies context, the translator points the exact location and likewise approximately the date of their preaching. Thus, if the preaching place of the *Homilies on the Gospel of Mark* is known as the Church of Nativity from Bethlehem, in respect to the *Various Homilies*, their preaching location overrides the geographical area of Bethlehem, some of them being preached in the Holy Resurrection Church or Martyrion Church of Jerusalem. In the absence of a precise temporal identification, their date

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cannot be precisely fixed. Most likely, they were preached after 397 A.C. The auditorium of all these homilies was made out of monks part of different monastic centers, not only of Bethlehem. Those wishing to become christians were among them as well. Regarding the language in which the homilies were preached, one assumes that Jerome addressed the audience in Latin first, following in Greek language (p. 10-17).

Jerome's Scripture interpretation has trinitarian and christocentric dimension. The whole Scripture directs readers towards Christ. More than this, the Scriptures not only speak about God, but Christ Himself is present inside them, offering Himself within. Likewise, the hermeneutics has a profound ecclesial dimension. Blessed Jerome preserved from Origen the teaching on the triple meaning of Scripture: bodily, moral and spiritual (p. 18-23). As to the limits of the biblical interpretation, Blessed Jerome says it has to be followed a balanced path between the two evenly erroneous extremes: Origen's radical allegory and flat literalism specific to the Hebrews, anthropomorphites and Theodore of Mopsuestia (p. 23-32).

Homilies on the Gospel of Mark build the first patristic text proposing the clarification of the second Gospel (p. 36). The first homily (Mark 1, 1-12) deals with the beginning of the Gospel, where Saint John the Baptist is not only the prophet who announces Christ, but also a symbol of the Old Law inferior to the New Law. Instead, the Baptism of the Savior send one directly to the mystery of the Trinity and His retreat and temptation in the wilderness offers the ultimate model of monastic life (p. 39-51).

The second homily (Mark 1, 13-31) comments Christ's arrival in Galilee and the beginning of His preaching after Saint John the Baptist's arrest. Symbolically, these events mark the withdrawal of the Old Law from history, to make room for the universal message of the Gospel. Morally, the miracles of Jesus shows how faith in Christ leads to one's soul cleansing from passions; in mystical-prophetic sense, it embodies the conversion of the Gentiles and Hebrews (p. 52-68).

The third homily (Mark 5, 30-43) envisions in the same prophetic way the bleeding woman healing by Jesus – a symbol of idolatrous Gentiles – and the resurrection of Jairus' daughter – a symbol of the Synagogue – (p. 69-73).

The fourth homily (Mark 8, 1-9) deals with the similarities and differences between the two crowd feedings (p. 74-76), and within the fifth homily (Mark 8, 22-26), Blessed Jerome sees in the miracle of the blind man healing of Bethsaida the gradual ascension of the faithful Hebrew from letter to the spirit of Scripture (p. 77-82).

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In the sixth homily (Mark 9, 1-8) Blessed Jerome deals with the miracle of Transfiguration of the Lord. Symbolically, Christ the Word is Scripture itself. The Scripture letter appears as a dirty garment for those entangled within the literal meaning, who understand only “letters,” but for those who understand the spirit of the letter, the garment becomes radiant and bright (p. 83-93).

The seventh homily (Mark 11, 1-10) deals with biblical episode in which Jesus while in Bethany climbed on the donkey and the colt to enter Jerusalem. In a symbolic note, we find that Christ calls to Himself the Synagogue (symbolized by donkey) and the Gentiles (symbolized by colt) to lead them to faith (p. 94-98).

The eighth homily (Mark 11, 11-14) deals with the biblical episode occurred in the Monday of the Holy Week, when Jesus cursed the fig tree without fruit. The fig tree symbolizes the Jewish Synagogue, which has only words, but not the understanding of Scriptures (p. 99-104).

The ninth homily (Mark 11, 15-17) uttered in the Sunday before Lent deals with the vendors sent away by Jesus from the temple (p. 105-111).

The last one, the tenth homily (Mark 13, 32-35; 14, 3-6), explains the theological difficulty as priority: why Jesus says that the Son does not know the Day of Judgment? The homily continues with the anointing episode of Jesus from Bethany by a woman which had an alabaster bowl of ointment of very precious nard. She prefigures the Church, when she will chism the newly baptized ones at the end of Lent (p. 112-118).

Various Homilies – so called due to the variety of their content – could be arranged by thematic and chronological criteria. Thus, the first three homilies, which do not involve temporal indication, are considering the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John. This is why they are in continuity with *Homilies on the Gospel of Mark*. Instead, the following seven homilies have in their center the Christian holidays and the most important moments from monastic life: the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (fourth homily), Epiphany (fifth homily), Forgiveness Sunday before Lent (sixth homily), Holy Saturday (seventh and eighth homilies), Easter Sunday (ninth and tenth homilies). Although the years in which they were preached could differ, these texts succeed according to a calendar order. Finally, the last two texts (eleventh and twelfth homilies), discovered later, are staying together because they treat problems and moral issues of the monastic community (p. 121).

Ioan-Alexandru Stoienescu