

God our savior, wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:3-4). Today we celebrate the Memorial of Saint John Chrysostom who was nicknamed John with the Golden Tongue. He is considered the premier preacher of the church in his era.

Born in Antioch in the year 347, John's father died shortly after his birth. Widowed at the age of 20, his mother was nevertheless a woman of means with a strong character. "She not only instructed her son in piety, but also sent him to the best schools of Antioch."ⁱ John's classical education trained his mind for his future as a priest. As an adult, he met and was deeply impressed by Bishop Meletus. After studying Sacred Scripture and other religious works for three years, John was baptized. When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit led him into the desert for 40 days. John wanted to follow in those same footsteps and set out for the desert to live the ascetic life of a hermit.ⁱⁱ

Two years later and in ill health due to the extremely penitential lifestyle he embraced, he returned to Antioch to recover and begin studies for the priesthood. He was ordained at the age of 39 and served in his hometown for a dozen years.

One of his most well-known works was composed a year before that when he served as a transitional deacon. The book takes the form of a conversation between John and his friend Basil as they discuss the priesthood. Comparing the prophets of old to the priest who celebrates Mass, John wrote:

Picture Elijah and the vast multitude standing around him, and the sacrifice laid upon the altar of stones, and all the rest of the people hushed into a deep silence while the prophet alone offers up prayer: then the sudden rush of fire from Heaven upon the sacrifice:—these are marvelous things, charged with terror.

Now then pass from this scene to the rites which are celebrated in the present day; they are not only marvelous to behold, but transcendent in terror. There stands the priest, not bringing down fire from Heaven, but the Holy Spirit: and he makes prolonged supplication, not that some flame sent down from on high may consume the offerings, but that grace descending on the sacrifice may thereby enlighten the souls of all, and render them more refulgent than silver purified by fire. Who can despise this most awful mystery, unless he is stark mad and senseless? Or do you not know that no human soul could have endured that fire in the sacrifice, but all would have been utterly consumed, had not the assistance of God's grace been great.ⁱⁱⁱ

After a dozen years at the Cathedral in Antioch, his fame spread far and wide and the emperor insisted upon his appointment to fill the critical role as Patriarch of Constantinople. Although hesitant to take the position, the new Patriarch John pulled no punches in his preaching. He preached truth to power and railed against corruption and decadence. Having made enemies in high places, he was brought up on false charges and exiled to Armenia. Knowing from Scripture that the truth sets us free, he continued to preach and to write letters on all the Lord placed on his heart and his golden tongue. John Chrysostom died in exile in 407.

"In 438 the Emperor Theodosius II of Constantinople had John's body returned to Constantinople and did penance for the sins of his mother."^{iv} Many of Chrysostom's homilies are still appreciated today for their truth, beauty, and goodness as they continue to draw us closer to Christ:

When you are before the altar where Christ reposes, you ought no longer to think that you are amongst men; but believe that there are troops of angels and archangels standing by you, and trembling with respect before the sovereign Master of Heaven and earth. Therefore, when you are in church, be there in silence, fear, and veneration.^v

ⁱ ewtn.com/catholicism/saints/john-chrysostom-633

ⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/resource/55588/st-john-chrysostom

ⁱⁱⁱ fatherconlin.com/2017/01/18/a-summary-of-on-the-priesthood-by-st-john-chrysostom/

^{iv} Ibid, CNA

^v Ibid, CNA