

Saint John Chrysostom

SAINT OF THE DAY

13_09_2020



“The Blood of Christ renews in us the image of our King, produces an unspeakable beauty and does not allow the nobility of our souls to be destroyed, but continually irrigates and nourishes it”. This is how St John Chrysostom (c. 347-407), one of the great Greek-speaking Fathers who was proclaimed Doctor of the Church by St Pius V in 1568, together with his contemporaries St Athanasius (c. 295-373), St Basil the Great (c. 329-379) and St Gregory Nazianzen (c. 329-390), spoke of the Eucharistic mystery. Many pontiffs exhorted theologians and faithful to imitate his virtues. Among them are

Benedict XVI, who dwelt several times on the figure of the saint celebrated today, and St John Paul II, who in 2004 gave the Patriarch of Constantinople some of the relics of John Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzen venerated in Rome, seeing in that gesture “a blessed occasion to purify our wounded memories, to strengthen our journey of reconciliation”.

A native of Antioch, he lost his father as a young child. He had spent his youth “chained to the passions of the world”, as he himself would write. During his studies he met Bishop Meletius, asked to be baptized and began to take courses in biblical exegesis under the guidance of Diodorus of Tarsus, maturing the decision to remain celibate and embrace the ascetic life. For six years he retired to the desert of Syria, dedicating his days to prayer, fasting and studying the Holy Scriptures, as well as writing spiritual treatises, such as the fundamental *De Sacerdotio*. In this work, turning to St Basil, he expressed the amazement and sacred fear aroused by Jesus' sacrifice in the Eucharist: “When you see the sacrificed Lord lying on the altar and the priest standing praying over the victim... can you still think that you are among men, that you are on earth? Are you not, on the contrary, immediately transported to heaven?”.

After his return to Antioch he was ordained a deacon and then, after another five years of preparation, a priest. He refuted the Aryan heresy and became a famous preacher, capable of conveying the Scriptures in a comprehensible way to all the faithful: precisely because of his eloquence, a century after his death he was given the Greek nickname of Chrysostom, meaning “Mouth of Gold”. He exhorted the most educated in the truths of faith to teach others. He recommended the rich to give to the poor. He himself was very generous in alms and lived austere. He carried out his priestly ministry by putting into practice the meditations written during his life as a hermit in the desert: “The Lord explicitly said that concern for his flock was a proof of love for him”. Knowing the greatness of the sacraments, instituted by Christ himself, he wrote that priests “have received a power that God has granted neither to angels nor to archangels. [...] What priests do down here, God confirms up there”.

This profound awareness was always accompanied by humility, which he kept through constant prayer: “Nothing is worth as much as prayer; it makes possible what is impossible, easy what is difficult”. In 398 he became bishop of Constantinople. He gave impetus to the evangelization of the countryside and the building of hospitals, at the same time denouncing sin and vices. His zeal brought him enemies, both in the imperial court and in a part of the Eastern clergy fomented by Theophilus of Alexandria: in 403 he was first condemned to exile, from which he was soon recalled to

Constantinople among the acclamations of the people.

But the plots against him continued, despite the repeated interventions in his favour by Pope Innocent I ("John, your Bishop, suffered unjustly", he wrote in a letter to the faithful of Constantinople). On 9 June 404 the Emperor had him definitively removed from the city and his beloved flock. From exile he wrote to the Holy Father: "You have surpassed even the most affectionate Father in your benevolence and zeal for us". After three years of confinement in the mountains of Armenia he was transferred to Pontus, where he died on 14 September 407. His last earthly words were: "Glory to God in all things".

Learn more:

[Letter of Benedict XVI on the 16th centenary of the death of St John Chrysostom](#)

[Opera omnia](#) (texts in various languages)