

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

THE LESSON: TRUE INTEGRITY

*“Honour your father and your mother.”
(Exodus 20:12)*

John was born in Antioch (modern-day Turkey) in 347. He was raised by his widowed mother and given a good education. He wanted to become a monk, but his mother begged him not to leave her, so during her life he remained with her, but began to practice a monastic lifestyle in her home. When she died, John moved to a monastery in the Syrian mountains and was there for two years before the extreme austerity caused his health to break down.

*“If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.”
(Psalm 139:9-10)*

So John shifted gears. Back in Antioch again he became a priest, and preached often in the cathedral there. He was an excellent speaker and the people loved and respected him. But when the archbishop of Constantinople died, members of the imperial court in that city conspired to abduct John secretly (lest the people of Antioch resist), and installed him as the new archbishop. However, the powerful classes failed to anticipate the sort of man they now had on their hands: a man who would speak the truth and act with conscience – without compromise; a man who could not be bought, nor bullied.

*“In your teaching show integrity.”
(Titus 2:7-8)*

John strove for peace between the ruling class and the common people, and offered asylum in his cathedral to people from both ends of that spectrum in turn. He preached boldly from scripture and his words struck home for many. Some who heard him repented of their sins. Others, like the Empress Eudoxia, became angry. She tried to manipulate John by making grants to his church, which he accepted with thanks, but he did not alter his preaching one iota.

John was driven into exile, though the people rioted in response. While in exile, John had no cathedral at which to preach, but this did not stop him from writing. His influence continued, to the frustration of the empress, who wished him dead. She consequently ordered that he be marched to a more remote location. John was made to walk in harsh conditions till he collapsed from exhaustion. He asked, and was granted, permission to pause at a roadside church, where he received communion and then died, saying, “Glory be to God for all things. Amen” (Sampson, *Layman’s*).

*“You have upheld me because of my integrity,
and set me in your presence for ever.”
(Psalm 41:12)*

Before his exile, in one of his sermons at the cathedral in Constantinople, John spoke these words:

“You know why they are going to depose me, because I spread no fine carpets, and wear no silken robes; because I have not pampered their gluttony, or made presents in gold and silver... But we fear not to be overwhelmed, for we stand upon a Rock. They cannot sink the vessel of Jesus Christ. Tell me, what is it we fear? Death? ‘To me to live is Christ and to die is gain.’ Or exile? ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.’ Or confiscation of goods? ‘We brought nothing into this world, and we can carry nothing out.’ I fear not poverty. I desire not wealth. I dread not death. I do not pray for life, save only for your advancement” (Sampson, *Layman’s*).

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

A century after his death, this saintly man came to be known as “John, the Golden-Mouthed,” or in Greek, “John Chrysostom”.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: DAVID FARMER, “OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS” | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, “THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 1” | GERARD SAMPSON, “LAYMAN’S BOOK OF SAINTS”.)

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON’T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON’T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Review today’s lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of John Chrysostom that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you’ve chosen. Decide on one concrete action you can take this week based on your reflections.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee; and dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests: Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. Amen.

(A PRAYER OF SAINT CHRYSOSTOM, P. 35)