

13th September 2021, Memorial of St. John Chrysostom (349 - 407)

Gospel Luke 7:1-10

Today we celebrate the memorial of St. John Chrysostom, one of the fathers of the Church, who became Patriarch of Constantinople in 397. His surname “Chrysostom” means “golden-mouth” in recognition of the elegance of his preaching, and a huge amount of this has survived and come down to us. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, published in 1992 quotes him a lot, and in the section on the Eucharist we read,

“It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but He who was crucified for us, Christ Himself. The priest in the role of Christ pronounces these words but the power and grace are God’s” (St. John Chrysostom in Catechism para 1375).

The Gospel today gives us the origin of the wonderful prayer we say before receiving the Lord in Holy Communion, the words of the centurion “I am not worthy to have you under my roof... give the word and let my servant be cured” (Lk. 7:6-7). The centurion acknowledges his own unworthiness, something that we do at every celebration of Holy Mass. Jesus praises him for his faith, a faith that is so strong and complete which Jesus has not met elsewhere in His travels. We only need to think about St. Peter’s remonstrance with the Lord in yesterday’s Gospel (c.f. Mk. 8:27-35). He had faith to understand who Jesus is but relied on his human understanding of what a Messiah should be like. The centurion however, had no preconceptions and trusted the power of Christ completely.

This brings us back to the quote from today’s saint. St. John Chrysostom is teaching us that the change of substance of the bread and wine to the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is nothing to do with man but everything to do with God. Jesus Christ, who is fully God can do anything – He has the power to heal a servant without touching Him and He has the power to change the bread and wine into His Real presence.

We may not have the eloquence of St. John Chrysostom but we can have the same faith as the centurion. Despite the unworthiness of the centurion, Christ acted. Despite our unworthiness, Christ still comes to us in the Eucharist. Let us recognise our own unworthiness to receive Christ in the Eucharist whilst praying for an increase in faith and in trust in Him.