



## **The Triumph of the Church.**

*By Saint John Chrysostom*

How can it be proved that Christ is God?

Let's not try to answer this basic question with the argument of the creation of Heaven and earth, because the unbeliever will not accept it. If we tell him that He resurrected from the dead, healed the blind, chased out demons, neither then will he agree. If we tell him that He promised the resurrection of the dead, the kingdom of Heaven and inexpressible goods, then not only will he not agree, but he will laugh as well.

So how will we guide him to faith, when he is not even spiritually cultivated? Of course, by basing it on truths which we and he both accept without any objection or doubt.

So on what point do we agree with him absolutely? On the fact that Christ planted the Church. From here we will reveal the power and prove Christ's divinity. We will see that it is impossible for the spreading of Christianity in the whole universe in such a brief time period to be a human work. And furthermore for Christian morality to invite people with evil habits, slaves of sin, to a higher life. Nevertheless, the Lord managed to free from all these not only us but also the whole human race.

He managed this without using weapons, without spending money, without moving armies, without causing wars. He managed it setting out with only twelve followers who were unimportant, simple, uneducated, poor, naked, weaponless.

With such followers he managed to convince the pagans to think correctly, not only about the present life, but also about the future life. He managed to abolish ancestral laws, to uproot ancient customs and to plant new ones. He managed to tear man away from the easy way of life and lead him to the difficult way. And all these things He managed to do while everyone fought Him, while He Himself had endured a humiliating crucifixion and a humbling death!

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Of course, these things don't happen to people. Rather the opposite usually happens, as long as they live and prosper, their work progresses. When they die, however, whatever they created is destroyed together with them. And this not only the rich suffer, nor only the rulers, but even the kings themselves, because their laws are abolished, their memory is erased, their name is forgotten and their trusted people are scorned.

These things happen to those who formerly with one nod governed peoples and led whole armies to war, to those who condemned to death and who recalled exiled people.

The exact opposite happened to the Lord, however. Grievous was the state of His work before the crucifixion: Judas betrayed Him, Peter denied Him, the rest of the disciples fled to save themselves and many believers abandoned Him. He remained alone among the enemies. However, after the slaughter and the death, so that you can learn that the Crucified One was not just a simple person, everything became more brilliant, more joyous. Peter, the chief of the Apostles, who before the crucifixion did not endure the threat of a door keeper but rather after so many heavenly teachings and the participation in divine mysteries, said that he did not know the Lord, after the crucifixion he himself preached to the ends of the universe. Innumerable multitudes of martyrs were sacrificed because they preferred to be slaughtered rather than to deny Christ as the chief of the Apostles had in dread at the threat of a door keeper. Now all the countries, all the cities, the desert and inhabited areas confess the Crucified One. Kings and generals, rulers and counsels, slaves and free people, the uneducated and the educated, barbarians and the various nations of people, all believe in Him..

Even that small and inconspicuous tomb which received the slaughtered body of the Lord is now more precious than a thousand royal palaces and is venerable to kings themselves.

Furthermore, the strange thing is that what happened to the Lord also happened to His disciples. They who were scorned and put in prison, who were harshly tortured with countless martyrdoms, these same ones, after their deaths, were honored even more than kings.

And how does this show? In Rome the kings and the counsels and the generals abandon everything and hasten to venerate the tombs of the fisherman Peter and the tentmaker Paul. In Constantinople they who wear crowns desire to be buried not just near the tombs of the Apostles, but in the courtyards of their churches. And thus the kings become doorkeepers of the fishermen! Moreover, they are not ashamed of this fact, rather boast about it. And not only they themselves boast, but even their descendants.

When the followers of Christ were only twelve and the Church did not exist in anyone's thoughts, when the Jewish synagogue still flourished and impious idolatry prevailed in almost the whole universe, the Lord had prophesied: "Upon this rock (that is, on the confession of faith of Peter, I will build My church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

Can you ascertain the truth of this prophecy? Do you see its fulfillment? Think what an important event is the spreading of the Church throughout almost the whole world in a brief period of time. Think how the life of so many nations changed and so many people brought to the faith; how it abolished ancestral customs; how it freed from many year long customs; how it scattered like dust the domination of pleasure and the power of sin; how it wiped out like smoke the impure incense of the sacrifices, the abhorrent feasts, the statues, the altars and the temples; how it built holy altars in our homeland and everywhere, in the countries of the Persians, the Skythians, the Blacks, the Indians. What am I saying? Even in the British isles, which are far from the Mediterranean, in the ocean, the Church spread and altars were built.

The words which the Lord proclaimed sprouted in the hearts of all. We can say that the earth that was full of thorns accepted the seed of faith.

The work of the liberation of so many peoples from the longstanding lewd customs, as well as the alteration of the way of life from the easy way to the very difficult way, is truly amazing, indeed, exceedingly amazing. It proves divine energy, that even if no one prevented it, peace prevailed and many helped, without anyone opposing. Because the spread of the Church did not just come into clashes with ancient habits, but also with pleasure and the pleasant manner of life. It had two strong opponents that tyrannized people: habit and pleasure.

Whatever they had received many centuries earlier from their fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers and more ancient forebears, even all they had received from philosophers and orators, all these things they agreed to scorn, something exceptionally difficult to do. They had to accept a new way of life, and moreover a much more difficult life. It took away from delight and led to fasting. It took away from money-loving and led to possessionlessness. It took away from lewdness and led to chastity. It took away from anger and led to meekness. It took away from envy and led to friendship. It took away from the comfortable and pleasant life and led to the difficult, to the "grievous" and harsh life. Furthermore, it led to this life those who had gotten used to the life of comforts. Because it was not people who lived in other worlds and did not have sinful habits who became Christians, but those who had rotted in these and had become softer than clay.

These it commanded to walk the difficult, the “grievous”, the harsh and rough road. And she convinced them to walk it!

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Whom did she convince? Not only two or ten or twenty or one hundred, but innumerable people. And with whom did she convince them? With twelve uneducated, uncultivated, unknown, without estates, without physical power, without glory, without a bright ancestry, without eloquence or oratory. With twelve people who were fishermen, tent makers, foreigners. They did not even have the same language as the idolaters. They spoke Hebrew which differed quite a bit from all the other languages. So with these twelve the Church was built and spread to the ends of the universe.

And the amazing thing is not just this, but also that these few, poor, uneducated and scorned people, who undertook to correct humanity, did not do their job unhampered. Everywhere they faced innumerable battles. They fought them in every nation and in every city. What am I saying, nations and cities? In every house a battle was stirred up against them. Their teaching many times separated the child from the father, the daughter-in-law from the mother-in-law, one brother from another, the slave from the master, the subject from the ruler, the husband from the wife and the wife from the husband. Not everyone in every family believed simultaneously. Thus the Christians endured daily battles, ceaseless enmities, a million deaths.

As common opponents and enemies everyone fought them. Kings, rulers, subjects, free people, slaves, crowds, cities persecuted them. Not only did they persecute them, but something dreadful, they persecuted even the newly planted catechumens, that is those who had just believed.

The thought of abandoning the idolatrous altars, of scorning the sacrifices which their fathers and forebears performed, and to believe in the Lord caused the idolaters to freak and be enraged. To believe in Him Who received human flesh from the Virgin Mary, Who was tried by Pilate, who suffered innumerable pains and humiliations, Who endured the dishonorable death, Who was buried and resurrected.

The strange thing is that, whereas the passions of the Lord were undoubtable--many had seen the whippings, the beatings, the spittings, the slaps, the cross, the mockeries, the tomb--the same thing did not happen with the resurrection. The Lord after the resurrection appeared only to disciples. Despite this fact, they spoke of the resurrection and convinced the people and the Church was built. How? In what manner? With the Lord's power, Who sent them to evangelize the nations. He it was Who smoothed out their road and facilitated their difficult work. If divine

power had not strengthened them, neither would the spreading of Christianity have begun.

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One cannot even build one wall with stones and asbestos while he is being persecuted, yet the Apostles were building the Church in the whole universe while suffering persecutions, imprisonments, exiles and martyr deaths. And they were not building her with stones, but with souls, something much more difficult, because it is not the same to build a wall by convincing corrupt souls to change their manner of life, to abandon their demonic mania and to follow the life of virtue.

They managed this, however, because they had with them the invincible power of the Lord Who had prophesied: “I shall build my church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it” (Math. 16:18).

Consider how many tyrants fought the Church and how many dreadful persecutions they stirred up against her...Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus and all their successors up to Constantine the Great, all were idolaters. And all of them, some less so, some more harshly, fought the Church. They all fought her. And if some did not stir up persecutions themselves, nevertheless their attachment to idolatry encourage anyone who wanted to flatter them in the struggle against the Church.

Despite all this, the evil-willed plans and attacks of the idolaters were scattered like spider webs. They were scattered like dust. They vanished like smoke. But also whatever they planned against the Church became cause to bring forth great benefit to the Christians, because they created the choirs of martyrs, who comprise the treasure, the pillars, the towers of the Church.

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So do you see the wondrous fulfillment of the prophecy? Truly “the gates of hades shall not prevail against it”. From the past, however, believe also about the future. In

the future no one will be able to overcome the

Church. Because if they did not manage to crush her when she numbered a few members, when her teaching seemed new and strange, when such dreadful opponents and so many persecutions from everywhere were stirred up against her, much more so will they not be able to harm her now when she prevails all over the universe, since she overcame all nations and annihilated the altars and the idols, the feasts and the rites, the smoke and the fumes of the fowl sacrifices.

How did the Apostles succeed in such a great and important undertaking, after so many obstacles? Of course with the divine and invincible power of Him Who prophesied the creation and triumph of the Church. No one can deny this unless he is senseless and absolutely incapable of thinking.

*Translated by Fr. Nicholas Palis from the Greek Book "Voice of the Fathers"  
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