

0345-0407 – Iohannes Chrysostomus – To Presbyters Of Antioch

Letters Of St. Chrysostom To Castus, Valerius, Diophantus, Cyriacus

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which he will not find you have already abundantly made yourself undergo. For by always walking in the narrow and strait path, you have trained yourself in all these things. Wherefore having practised this most beautiful art in the course of your training, you now shine forth the more gloriously in the contest itself, not only being in no wise disturbed by the things which are happening, but rather elated, and leaping and dancing for joy. For the contests which you have anticipated in your training you now undertake with much ease, although it be in a woman's body, feebler than a cobweb, treading under foot with derisive scorn the fury of lusty men gnashing their teeth upon you; being ready to suffer even worse things than they prepare for you. Happy and thrice happy are you by reason of the crowns of victory to be won, but even more by reason of the contest itself. For such is the nature of these struggles, even before the prizes are given even in the midst of strife they have their recompense and reward;—the pleasure which you are now enjoying, the cheerfulness, the courage, the endurance, the patience, the power which is proof against capture and conquest and rises superior to all things; the perfect training which renders you insensible to any terror at the hands of any one, the power of standing on a rock in the midst of mighty billows of tribulation, and sailing in a calm with a favourable breeze when the sea is raging around you. These are the prizes of affliction even in this world before the kingdom of heaven is won. For I know very well that, even at this present time, being elated with joy, thou dost not consider thyself clothed with a body, but if an opportunity should summon thee to do it, thou wouldst divest thyself of it more readily than others do of the raiment which they wear. Rejoice therefore and be glad both for thyself, and for those who have died a blessed death, not in a bed, nor in a house, but in prison, and chains, and torment; and bewail those only who do these things, and grieve for them. But since you also wish to be informed concerning my bodily health, let me tell you that I have been relieved for the present from the infirmity which was lately oppressing me, and am now in a more comfortable condition: the only fear is lest the winter on its return should again make havoc of my feeble digestion; and as far as the Isaurians are concerned we now enjoy great security.

The following letter is added as a specimen, out of a very large number, of the natural, almost playful style, and tone of warm affection, in which Chrysostom wrote to his intimate friends. All his extant letters were written during his exile, and therefore there is much repetition in their contents, and great general similarity of character.



to castus, valerius, diophantus, cyriacus

presbyters of antioch.

I am not surprised that you call my long letter a short one. For this is just the way with lovers; they do not recognize such a thing as satiety, they will not admit such a thing as satisfaction, but

the more they receive from the objects of their love the more they seek. Therefore, even if the letter which you have received had been ten times as large as the former one, it would not have escaped the epithet of "brief;" in fact it would have been called a small letter, and not only would it have been so called, but it would have actually seemed such in your eyes. Hence I also in my turn am never satisfied with the measure of affection for me which you have attained, but am always seeking to make additions to your love-draught, and daily demanding the discharge of your love debt which is always being paid, and yet is always owing (for it is written, "owe no man anything but to love one another"⁹⁵⁹). I am indeed continually receiving what I ask in great abundance, yet never think that I have received the whole. Do not cease then to pay down this goodly debt, which has a twofold pleasure. For those who pay, and those who receive, derive equal enjoyment, inasmuch as they are both alike enriched by the payment; which in the case of money is an impossibility, for there the one who pays becomes poorer, and only the man who has received is richer. But this is not what commonly happens in the covenant of love. For he who pays it is not less bereft of it, as in the case of money when it is transferred to the receiver; but payment of love makes him who pays richer than before. Knowing these things then, O Sirs, most honoured and devout, cease not continually displaying this excellent disposition towards me. For although you need no exhortation for this purpose from me yet as I greatly long for your love I remind you, even when you need it not, both in order that you may constantly write to me, and also inform me of the state of your health. For even if you do not need any one to remind you on this account, I shall not desist from continually seeking this at your hands; as it is a matter which I have very much at heart. That it is a difficult task owing both to the season of the year, and the difficulty of the journey, and the scarcity of travellers who will do this service for you I am well aware: nevertheless as far as is possible and practicable in the midst of so much difficulty, we exhort you to write constantly, and crave this favour from your love.

⁹⁵⁹ Rom. xiii. 8.