



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©  
\* Knights of Malta \*

September  
2011

## Chancellor's Update

### ST BASIL THE GREAT, BISHOP AND DOCTOR *Concerning Faith*

1. The continual remembrance of God is a holy thing, and of this pious remembrance there can never be enough for the soul that loves God. But to put into words the things of God is a bold undertaking. For our mind falls far below what is needed for this; while at the same time, words but feebly convey the thoughts of the mind. If therefore our understanding is left so far behind by the greatness of the things of God, and if our words are weaker than our understanding, how should we not be silent, for fear that the wonders of the things of God should be in danger through the feebleness of our words? Though the desire to give glory to God is implanted by nature in every rational creature, nevertheless we all alike are unable to praise Him fittingly. But though we differ one from another in our desire to praise and serve God, yet there is no one so blinds himself, so deceives himself, as to think that he has attained to the summit of human understanding. Rather, the further we advance in knowledge, the more clearly we perceive our own insignificance. So it was with Abraham. So it was with Moses. For when it was given to them to see God, as far as man can see God, then especially did they humble themselves: Abraham spoke of himself as, *dust and ashes* (Gen. xviii. 27), and Moses said he was a stammerer and *slow of tongue* (Exod. iv. 10). For he knew the poverty of his tongue, and that it was unable to serve the greatness of the things he had grasped with his mind.

But since every ear is now open to hear me speak of the things of God, and since there is never enough in the Church of hearing of these things, confirming the words of Ecclesiastes about them: *The ear is not filled with hearing* (1. 8), we must therefore speak as best we can. But we shall speak, not of God as He is, but of God as far as it is possible for us to know Him. For though we cannot with mortal eyes see all that lies between heaven and earth, yet there is no reason why we should not look upon what we can see. So with our few words we shall now endeavor to fulfill what is required of us in the service of God; but in every word of ours we humbly bow before the majesty of His Divine Nature: for not even the tongue of Angels, whatever they may be, nor the tongues of Archangels, joined to those of every reasoning creature, would be able to describe its least part, much less attain to speak of the Whole.

But you, if you would speak of God, or hear of Him, go out from your body, put aside your bodily senses, leave this earth behind you, leave the sea behind you, set the skies beneath you, pass beyond the measuring of time, the procession of the seasons, the ordered perfection of the universe, rise above the heavens, pass beyond the stars, and the wonders that relate to them, their ordered movement, their magnitude, their service to all the universe, their harmony, their shining splendor, their ordered station, their motion, their rotation one in respect of another. Passing in mind beyond all these things, raised above them all, gaze in thought upon all the beauty there, upon the heavenly hosts, the Angelic Choirs, the Dignities of the Archangels, the Glory of the Dominations, the Seats of the Thrones, the Virtues, the Principalities, the Powers. Passing beyond all these, reaching upwards in thought beyond every created thing, uplifting the mind beyond them, now contemplate the Divine Nature: stable, immovable, unchangeable, impassable, simple, indivisible, *dwelling in light inaccessible* (I Tim. vi. 16), surpassing glory, goodness the most desired, beauty inconceivable; which fastens fiercely upon the soul, wounding it, yet cannot fittingly be spoken of in words.

2. There are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit: Nature Uncreated, Sovereign Majesty, Goodness Itself. The Father the beginning of all things, the Source of existence of all that is, the Root of all that lives. From Him comes forth the Fount of Life, Wisdom, Power, *the perfect Image of the invisible God* (Col. 1. 15), the Son Begotten of the Father, the Living Word, Who is God, Who is with God (Jn. 1. 2), not added to Him; Who is before all ages, not afterwards acquired; a Son, not a possession; a Maker, not made; a Creator, not created; Who is whatever the Father is.

Son, I say, and Father. Note with me these particular terms. While remaining as Son, He is all the Father is; as the words of the Lord Himself bear witness, saying: *All things whatsoever the Father hath, are mine* (Jn. xvi. 15). All that belongs to the First Form, is found also in the Image. For, *we saw his glory*, says the Evangelist, *the glory as it were of the Only-Begotten of the Father* (Jn. 1. 14); that is, He has not received all these wondrous things by gift or by grace, but by reason of their common Nature the Son shares with the Father the *glory* of the Godhead. For to receive, is common to everything created; to have by nature, belongs only to one who has been begotten. As Son therefore He possesses all that the Father possesses; and as the

Only-Begotten, He holds this *all* within Himself as His; sharing no part of it with another. From this that He is called *Son*, we learn that He shares His Father's Nature, that He was not created by the Divine command, but that beaming forth unceasingly from His Substance, united timelessly to the Father, He is equal to Him in Goodness, equal in Power, equal in Majesty. For what is He but His Seal and Image, wholly manifesting the Father in Himself?

All that is said to you after this of His bodily state, of the Plan of man's redemption, that He showed Himself to us clothed in Flesh, His saying that He was *sent*, that of Himself He could do nothing, that He had received a command, and such things, let none of these give you grounds to lessen in any way the Godhead of the Only-Begotten. For the condescension of His coming down to you, does not lessen the power of His Majesty. Rather, think of His nature in a manner befitting the Godhead, but accept the lowlier things spoken of Him as relating to the task of our redemption. And were we now to speak, with exactness, of these things, we would without noticing it heap up a vast, an endless number of words upon the subject.

3. But to return to the subject we have set before us. The mind then that has been able to purify itself of all earthly affections, and to leave behind it every known creature, and, like some fish from the deep, swim upwards to the light, now attaining to the purity of the beginning, with the Father and Son, there shall look upon the Holy Spirit, Who by reason of His essential Unity of Nature with Them shares also in their Goodness, Their Justice, Their Holiness, Their Life. For *Thy Spirit*, it is written, *is good* (Ps. cxlii. 10). And again, He is *a right Spirit* (Ps. 1. 12). And again, He is *Thy Holy Spirit* (v. 13). And the Apostle also speaks of: *The law of the Spirit of life* (Rom. viii. 2). Of these things none has been received by Him, none afterwards added to Him; but as heat is inseparable from fire and radiance from light, so Sanctification cannot be separated from the Holy Spirit, nor the Giving of Life, nor Goodness, nor Justice.

There then is the Spirit, there in the Blessed Nature; not numbered with a multitude, but contemplated in the Trinity; singly made known to us, not included within the heavenly orders. For as the Father is one, and the Son one, so likewise is the Holy Ghost one. But the ministering spirits each in their single order, shine forth to us an innumerable host. Seek not then among creatures that Which is above creation. And lower not the Sanctifier among those He sanctifies. He fills the Angels, He fills the Archangels, He sanctifies the Powers He gives life to all. He is divided among all creatures, and though partaken of in different measure by each yet in nothing is He lessened by those who partake of Him. To all He gives of His grace, remaining unconsumed by those who partake of it. And while they who receive are filled, in nothing is He lessened. And just as the sun shines on our bodies and is enjoyed by them in varying degrees, while in no way is its heat diminished by those who share in it, so also the Spirit, while giving of His grace to all, remains Himself whole and undivided.

He enlightens all men, that they may know God. He breathes upon the Prophets, He gives wisdom to lawmakers, He consecrates priests, fills kings with strength, perfects the just, honors the wise and prudent, works in the gifts of healing, gives life to the dead, frees those who are in bonds, and of strangers makes children of adoption. And all this He accomplishes through *the new birth* (cf. Jn. iii. 4). He finds a publican who now believes, and makes him an Evangelist (Mt. ix. 9). He comes upon one who is a fisherman, and makes him a Teacher of divine things (Mt. iv. 19). He comes upon a persecutor who has repented, and makes him the Apostle of the Gentiles, a Preacher of the Faith, a Vessel of election (Acts ix. 15). Through Him the weak become strong, the poor rich, the ignorant become wiser than the wise. Paul was weak, yet, through the Presence of the Spirit, the cloths that wiped the sweat of his body brought healing to those who touched them (Acts xix. 12). Peter too was clothed in a weak body, yet through the grace of the Spirit dwelling within him, the shadow of his body delivered the sick from their infirmities (Acts v. 15).

Peter and John were poor – for they had neither gold nor silver – yet they bestowed a healing more precious than much gold. The lame man that sat at the gate of the Temple received money from many people, yet remained a beggar. But receiving this grace from Peter he ceased to be a beggar, and leaping like a deer he began to praise God (Acts iii. 6). John knew not the wisdom of this world, but through the power of the Spirit he speaks of things that no human wisdom could come to know.

The Spirit dwells in heaven, yet fills the earth; and though present everywhere, is nowhere contained. He dwells Whole in each one, yet is wholly with God. He distributes His gifts, not as one who ministers, but of His own authority gives graces as He wills; for *He distributes*, says the Scriptures, *his gifts to each one as he wishes* (1 Cor. xii. 11). He is *sent* in the Divine Plan of our Redemption, but acts of His own power. Let us beg of Him to help us by His Presence in our souls, and that He may never depart from us, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory and honour world without end. Amen. (The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, vol. IV p 75-78 Regnery, Chicago, 1964)

Copyright 2011 by the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Inc. All rights reserved. The O.S.J. Messenger and the Chancellor's Update are among the authorized publications of the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Inc. and the Sovereign Order of Jerusalem-Knights of Malta. World Headquarters and Convent of the Order are located in Reading, Pennsylvania in the United States of America.



Jerusalem 1048-1291, Cyprus 1291-1310, Rhodes 1311-1523, Malta 1530-1798, Russia 1798-1907, U.S.A. 1908-

<http://sovereignorderofsaintjohnofjerusalemknightsofmalta.org/>