

## Feast of Saint John Chrysostom

September 13

I Cor 7:25-31

Ps 45:11-12, 14-15, 16-17

Lk 6:20-26

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### *Rejection and Hatred: A Way of Suffering and a Blessing in Disguise*

We all have experienced rejection and hatred in our lives. We probably also have been victims of other people's hatred. We may have been hated and rejected for our faith, for our values and even for our personalities. The way in which we deal with the hatred and rejection in our lives is certainly a way of suffering, our way of the Cross, but it is also a way to get closer to God, which is a blessing in disguise.

In my own personal experiences, whenever I am in this situation of hatred and rejection, I have to double my prayers — praying for myself and other people. I reflect and search my soul in silence; I use spiritual direction and participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Most of all, I just try and do my best to love unconditionally, regardless of how difficult it is sometimes. God's call, God's commandments can be very tough — a tall order indeed — and yet it is not impossible. Through His mercy, God gives us the grace to persevere.

Whenever we weep; whenever people reject and hate us because of our faith in God through Jesus Christ; whenever we are poor in spirit; and whenever we are hungry for God — we are blessed, as Jesus says to his disciples, in today's Gospel according to St. Luke.

The saint who we remember today, St. John Chrysostom, was no stranger to hatred, rejection and suffering. John was an archbishop of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul, Turkey) in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and he earned a reputation as a caring pastor and passionate preacher of practical Christianity. He had the unique ability “to say it like it is.”

Although John was loved by the ordinary people, he was hated by unrepentant clergy and some wealthy laity. John's predecessor, Nectarius, had wasted church revenues. So when John became archbishop, he cut down on expenses, opened hospitals and alleviated the misery of the poor. Since Nectarius had likewise permitted clerical laxity, John had to impose much-needed discipline. He ousted one deacon for murder; another for adultery. His clergy were forbidden to keep young deaconesses as housekeepers, a practice which created much scandal. Wealthy lay people were warned to moderate their celebrations and to make donations to the sick and the poor. St. John even repeatedly criticized the Empress Eudoxia for her vanity in makeup and dresses and her entertainments at court.

So John made many enemies — clergy, fellow bishops, wealthy lay people and even the imperial family. In order to get rid of John, Theophilus, the archbishop of Alexandria in Egypt, convened in Constantinople the illegal Synod of the Oak, in which 36 bishops deposed John from the office of patriarch. In John's absence, the synod found him guilty of 46 charges, including “misuse of church funds, tyrannical treatment of his clergy, irregularities in ritual, invasion of jurisdiction and even high treason.”

John was therefore exiled to Armenia, north of Turkey, despite the pleas of Christians in Constantinople, the pope in Rome and bishops throughout the western Empire. He continued his

influence, however, through extensive correspondence and letter-writing. The emperor then ordered John's transfer to even more remote Pityus, at the eastern edge of the Black Sea. The trip was to cover more than 600 miles across six mountain ranges. He was forced to march, bareheaded in the sun and rain. Worn out from hardship and fever, he died along the way at the age of 60. He served as archbishop of Constantinople for less than seven years.

In St. John Chrysostom we not only have a bishop and doctor of the Church, but also a martyr. Through his life and witness, John transformed the hatred many people had for him into the power and gift of love — love for God, love for his enemies and love for the people he cared for. As we continue in our Eucharist, we ask for St. John's prayers — for courage and patience in times of difficulty and rejection, and remember that the ways in which we suffer, the ways in which we deal with hatred and rejection in our lives, are blessed moments indeed — windows of opportunity to get closer to God.