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Homilies On S. Ignatius And S. Babylas

On the holy martyr, s. Babylas

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ST. CHRYSOSTOM:

HOMILIES ON S. IGNATIUS AND S. BABYLAS

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INTRODUCTION TO THE HOMILIES ON S. IGNATIUS AND S. BABYLAS.

The following have been selected out of a large number delivered by Chrysostom on the festivals of saints and martyrs, not only because they are good samples of his discourses on such occasions, but also on account of the celebrity of the two saints in whose honour they were spoken. There is really very little known about Ignatius beyond the fact that he was Bishop of Antioch, and suffered martyrdom at Rome in the reign of Trajan about the year 110 a.d.: being torn to death by wild beasts in the colossal amphitheatre erected for the display of such inhuman sports by the emperors

of the Flavian dynasty. The tradition that he was a disciple of St. John does not rest on any trustworthy evidence, but on the other hand there is nothing inherently impossible or even improbable in the supposition.

According to a tradition which cannot be traced back earlier than the latter part of the fourth century the reliques were translated from Rome to Antioch and deposited in the Christian cemetery outside the gates called the Daphnitic gate, because it led from the city to the famous suburb of Daphne, on which we shall have more to say presently. It is clear from the following eulogy that Chrysostom accepted this tradition, and his repeated invitation to his hearers to “come hither” to enjoy the beneficent influence of the saint seems to imply that his discourse was delivered in the “martyr,” that is the chapel erected to contain the martyr’s remains, not in the “Great Church” of Antioch where he commonly preached. In the next generation the reliques of the saint were again translated by the Emperor, the younger Theodosius, to the building which had been the temple of the “Fortune of Antioch,” and then the illustrious Christian martyr was substituted for the mythical goddess on the tutelary genius of the city.

The fame of S. Babylas rivalled and for a time almost threatened to overshadow that of S. Ignatius. He had been Bishop of Antioch about 237 to 250. The heroic courage with which he had once repulsed the Emperor Philip from the church until he should have submitted to penance for some offence committed, and his martyrdom in the persecution under Decius were his original claims to popular veneration. But some later events shed a fresh lustre on his name. In the year 351 the Cæsar Gallus, brother of Julian, being resident in Antioch, transferred the reliques of Babylas from their resting place within the city to the beautiful suburb the garden or grove of Daphne. “In the history of this spot we have a singular instance of the way in which Grecian legend was transplanted into foreign soil. Daphne the daughter of the river-god Ladon were according to the Syrian version of the myth, overtaken by her lover Apollo near Antioch. Here it was, on the banks not of the Peneus but of the Oronete, that the maiden prayed to her mother earth to open her arms and shelter her from the pursuit of the amorous god, and that the laurel plant sprang out of the spot where she vanished from the eyes of her disappointed lover. The house of Seleucus Nicator, founder of the Syrian monarchy was said to have struck his hoof upon one of the arrows dropped by Apollo in the hurry of his pursuit; in consequence of which the king dedicated the place to the god. A temple was erected in his honour, ample in its proportions, sumptuous in its adornments; the internal walls were resplendent with polished marbles, the lofty ceiling was of cypress wood. The colossal image of the god, enriched with gold and gems, nearly reached the top of the roof. * * * With one hand the deity lightly touched the lyre which hung from his shoulders and in the other he held a golden dish, as if about to pour a libation on the earth “and supplicate the venerable mother to give to his arms the cold and beauteous Daphne.”³⁶⁴ The whole grove became consecrated to pleasure under the guise of festivity in honor of the god. * * * It contained everything which could gratify

³⁶⁴ Gibbon, vol. iv. p. 111. Milman’s ed.

and charm the senses; the deep impenetrable shade of cypress trees, the delicious noise and coolness of falling waters, the fragrance of aromatic shrubs; there were also baths, and grottos, porticoes, and colonnades. Such materials for voluptuous enjoyment told with fatal effect upon the morals of a people addicted at all times to an immoderate indulgence in luxurious pleasure.³⁶⁵ Daphne became one of those places where gross and shameless vice was practised under the sanction of religion. The intention of Cæsar Gallus in translating the reliques of Babylas to Daphne was as Chrysostom expresses it to “bring a physician to the sick;” to introduce a pure and Christian association into a spot hitherto consecrated to Pagan and licentious rites. The bones of the saint were laid near the shrine of Apollo, and the Christian church standing hard by the heathen temple was a visible warning to any Christian who might visit the place to abstain from deeds abhorrent to the faith for which the bishop had died. But the remains of the martyr were not permitted to rest in peace. When the Emperor Julian visited Antioch 362, he consulted the oracle of Apollo at Daphne respecting the issue of the expedition which he was about to make into Persia. But the oracle was dumb. At length the god yielded to the importunity of prayers and sacrifices so far as to explain the cause of his silence. He was offended by the proximity of dead men. “Break open the sepulchres, take up the bones, and carry them hence.” No name was mentioned, but the demand was interpreted as referring to the remains of Babylas, and the wishes of the affronted deity were complied with. The Christians were commanded by Julian to remove the bones of their saint from the neighbourhood of Apollo’s sanctuary. They obeyed, but what was intended to be a humiliation was converted into a triumph. The reliques were conveyed to their resting place within the city as in a kind of festive procession, accompanied by crowds along the whole way, four or five miles, chanting the words of the Psalm, “Confounded be all they that worship carved images and delight in vain gods.” In vain were some of the Christians seized and tortured. The popularity of the saint grew in proportion as Julian tried to put it down; and the insults done to him were speedily avenged. A fire, mysterious in its origin, broke out soon after the removal of the martyr’s reliques in the shrine of Apollo, consuming the roof of the building, and the statue of the god. At the time when Chrysostom preached, about twenty years later, the columns and walls were still standing, the melancholy wreck serving as a memorial and witness of the judgment which had fallen upon the place.

The remains of Babylas were not brought back to Daphne, but removed from the city to a magnificent church built to receive them on the other side of Orontes. Near the close of his discourse Chrysostom refers to the erection of this church and to the zeal of the Bishop Meletius in promoting it, who actually took part in the work with his own hands, as we are told that Hugh did in the building of the Minster at Lincoln. But although the body of the martyr rested elsewhere, his spirit and influence were supposed to inhabit in a special manner the spot where he had put the heathen deity to silence and shame, and to confer blessings on the pilgrims who resorted in crowds to his martyr in Daphne. The ruined and deserted temple indeed, and the well preserved Christian church thronged with worshippers, standing as they did side by side, formed a striking emblem of the two

³⁶⁵ Life of St. John Chrysostom, by W. R. W. Stephens, pp. 101–3, 3d ed.

religions to which they were devoted—the one destined to crumble and vanish away, the other to endure and conquer.



HOMILIES ON S. IGNATIUS AND S. BABYLAS.

eulogy.

On the holy martyr Saint Ignatius, the god-bearer,³⁶⁶ arch-bishop of Antioch the great, who was carried off to Rome, and there suffered martyrdom, and thence was conveyed back again to Antioch.

1. Sumptuous and splendid entertainers give frequent and constant entertainments, alike to display their own wealth, and to show good-will to their acquaintance. So also the grace of the Spirit, affording us a proof of his own power, and displaying much good-will towards the friends of God, sets before us successively and constantly the tables of the martyrs. Lately, for instance, a maiden quite young, and unmarried, the blessed martyr Pelagia, entertained us, with much joy. To-day again, this blessed and noble martyr Ignatius has succeeded to her feast. The persons are different: The table is one. The wrestlings are varied: The crown is one. The contests are manifold: The prize is the same. For in the case of the heathen contests, since the tasks are bodily, men alone are, with reason, admitted. But here, since the contest is wholly concerning the soul, the lists are open to each sex, for each kind the theatre is arranged. Neither do men alone disrobe, in order that the women may not take refuge in the weakness of their nature, and seem to have a plausible excuse, nor have women only quitted themselves like men, lest the race of men be put to shame; but on this side and on that many are proclaimed conquerors, and are crowned, in order that thou mayest learn by means of the exploits themselves that in Christ Jesus neither male nor female,³⁶⁷ neither sex, nor weakness of body, nor age, nor any such thing could be a hindrance to those who run in the course of religion; if there be a noble readiness, and an eager mind, and a fear of God, fervent and kindling, be established in our souls. On this account both maidens and women, and men, both young and old, and slaves, and freemen, and every rank, and every age, and each sex, disrobe for

³⁶⁶ “Theophoros.” This was probably only a second name assumed by Ignatius, perhaps at the time of his conversion or baptism. Legendary interpretations of it afterwards arose, which varied according as it was understood in an active or passive sense, the “god-bearer” or the “god-borne.” See Bishop Lightfoot’s *Apostolic Fathers*, vol. i., part ii., p. 25–28.

³⁶⁷ Gal. iii. 28.

grace. For if in the case of Elisha this happened, and a corpse when it touched the sepulchre, burst the bands of death and returned to life again,³⁸¹ much rather now, when grace is more abundant, when the energy of the spirit is greater, is it possible that one touching a sepulchre, with faith, should win great power; thence on this account God allowed us the remains of the saints, wishing to lead by them us to the same emulation, and to afford us a kind of haven, and a secure consolation for the evils which are ever overtaking us. Wherefore I beseech you all, if any is in despondency, if in disease, if under insult, if in any other circumstance of this life, if in the depth of sins, let him come hither with faith, and he will lay aside all those things, and will return with much joy, having procured a lighter conscience from the sight alone. But more, it is not only necessary that those who are in affliction should come hither, but if any one be in cheerfulness, in glory, in power, in much assurance towards God, let not this man despise the benefit. For coming hither and beholding this saint, he will keep these noble possessions unmoved, persuading his own soul to be moderate by the recollection of this man's mighty deeds, and not suffering his conscience by the mighty deeds to be lifted up to any self conceit. And it is no slight thing for those in prosperity not to be puffed up at their good fortune, but to know how to bear their prosperity with moderation, so that the treasure is serviceable to all, the resting place is suitable, for the fallen, in order that they may escape from their temptations, for the fortunate, that their success may remain secure, for those in weakness indeed, that they may return to health, and for the healthy, that they may not fall into weakness. Considering all which things, let us prefer this way of spending our time, to all delight, all pleasure, in order that rejoicing at once, and profiting, we may be able to become partakers with these saints, both of their dwelling and of their home, through the prayers of the saints themselves, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom be glory to the Father with the Holy Spirit, now and always forever and ever amen.



on the holy martyr, s. babylas.

1. I was anxious to-day to pay the debt which I promised you when I was lately here. But what am I to do? In the meanwhile, the blessed Babylas has appeared, and has called me to himself, uttering no voice, but attracting our attention by the brightness of his countenance. Be ye not, therefore, displeased at the delay in my payment; at all events, the longer the time is, the more the interest will increase. For we will deposit this money with interest.³⁸² Since thus did the master command who entrusted it to us. Being confident, therefore, about what is lent, that both the principal and the profit await you, let us not pass by the gain which falls in our way to-day, but revel in the noble actions of the blessed Babylas.

³⁸¹ 2 Kings xiii. 21.

³⁸² Luke xix. 23.

How, indeed, he presided over the Church which is among us, and saved that sacred ship, in storm, and in wave, and billow; and what a bold front he showed to the emperor, and how he lay down his life for the sheep and underwent that blessed slaughter; these things and such as these, we will leave to the elder among our teachers, and to our common father, to speak of. For the more remote matters, the aged can relate to you but as many things as happened lately, and within our lifetime, these, I a young man will relate to you, I mean those after death, those after the burial of the martyr, those which happened while he remained in the suburbs of the city. And I know indeed that the Greeks will laugh at my promise, if I promise to speak of the noble deeds after death and burial of one who was buried, and had crumbled to dust. We shall not assuredly on this account keep silence, but on this very account shall especially speak, in order that by showing this marvel truly, we may turn their laughter upon their own head. For of an ordinary man there would be no noble deeds after death. But of a martyr, many and great deeds, not in order that he might become more illustrious (for he has no need of glory from the multitude), but that thou, the unbeliever mayest learn that the death of the martyrs is not death, but the beginning of a better life, and the prelude of a more spiritual conversation, and a change from the worse to the better. Do not then look at the fact, that the mere body of the martyr lies destitute of energy of soul; but observe this, that a greater power takes its place by the side of it, different from the soul itself—I mean the grace of the Holy Spirit, which pleads to all on behalf of the resurrection, by means of the wonders which it works. For if God has granted greater power to bodies dead and crumbled to dust, than to all living, much more will he grant to them a better life than the former, and a longer, at the time of the bestowal of his crowns; what then are this saint's noble deeds? But be not disturbed, if we take our discourse a little further back. For they who wish to display their portraits to advantage, do not uncover them until they have placed the spectators a little way off from the picture, making the view clearer by the distance. Do you then also have patience with me while I direct my discourse into the past.

For when Julian who surpassed all in impiety, ascended the imperial throne, and grasped the despotic sceptre, straightway he lifted up his hands against the God who created him, and ignored his benefactor, and looking from the earth beneath to the heavens, howled after the manner of mad dogs, who alike bay at those who do not feed them and those who do feed them. But he rather was mad with a more savage madness than theirs. For they indeed turn from, and hate their friends and strangers alike. But this man used to fawn upon demons, strangers to his salvation, and used to worship them with every mode of worship. But his benefactor, and Saviour, and him who spared not the only Begotten, for his sake, he turned from and used to hate, and made havoc of the cross, the very thing which uplifted the whole world when it was lying prostrate, and drove away the darkness on all sides, and brought in light more brilliant than the sunbeams; nor yet even then did he desist from his frenzy, but promised that he would tear the nation of the Galilæans, out of the midst of the world; for thus he was wont to call us; and yet if he thought the names of the Christians an abomination, and Christianity itself to be full of much shame, for what reason did he not desire to put us to shame by that means, but with a strange name? Yea because he knew clearly, that to

be called by what belongs to Christ, is a great ornament not only to men, but to angels, and to the powers above. On this account he set everything in motion, so as to strip us of this ornament, and put a stop to the preaching of it. But this was impossible, O wretched and miserable man! as it was impossible to destroy the heaven and to quench the sun, and to shake and cast down the foundations of the earth, and those things Christ foretold, thus saying: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."³⁸³

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Well, thou dost not submit to Christ's words; accept therefore the utterance which thus his deeds give. For I indeed having been privileged to know what the declaration of God is, how strong, how invincible a thing, have believed that is more trustworthy than the order of nature, and than experience in all matters. But do thou still creeping on the ground, and agitated with the investigations of human reasoning, receive the witness of the deeds. I gainsay nothing. I strive not.

2. What then do the deeds say? Christ said that it was easier for heaven and earth to be destroyed, than for any of his words to fail.³⁸⁴ The emperor contradicted these words, and threatened to destroy his decrees. Where then is the emperor who threatened these things? He is perished and is corrupted, and is now in Hades, awaiting the inevitable punishment. But where is Christ who uttered these decrees? In Heaven, on the right hand of the Father, occupying the highest throne of glory; where are the blasphemous words of the Emperor, and his unchastened tongue? They are become ashes, and dust and the food of worms. Where is the sentence of Christ? It shines forth by the very truth of the deed, receiving its lustre from the issue of the events, as from a golden column. And yet the emperor left nothing undone, when about to raise war against us, but used to call prophets together, and summon sorcerers, and everything was full of demons and evil spirits.

What then was the return for this worship? The overturning of cities, the bitterest famine of all famines. For ye know doubtless, and remember, how empty indeed the market place was of wares, and the workshops full of confusion, when everyone strove to snatch up what came first and to depart. And why do I speak of famine, when the very fountains of waters were failing, fountains which by the abundance of their stream, used to eclipse the rivers. But since I have mentioned the fountains, come, forthwith, let us go up to Daphne, and conduct our discourse to the noble deeds of the martyr. Although you desire me still to parade the indecencies of the Greeks, although I too desire this, let us abstain; for wherever the commemoration of a martyr is, there certainly also is the shame of the Greeks. This emperor then, going up to Daphne used to weary Apollo, praying, supplicating, entreating, so that the events of the future might be foretold to him. What then did the prophet, the great God of the Greeks? "The dead prevent me from uttering," saith he, "but break open the graves, dig up the bones, move the dead." What could be more impious than these commands? The Demon of grave-robbing, introduces strange laws and devises new methods of expelling strangers. Who ever heard of the dead being driven forth? who ever saw lifeless bodies ordered to be moved as he commanded, overturning from their foundations the common laws of

³⁸³ Matt. xxiv. 35.

³⁸⁴ Luke xvi. 17.

nature. For the laws of nature are common to all men, that he who departs this life should be hidden in the earth, and delivered over for burial, and be covered up in the bosom of the earth the mother of all; and these laws, neither Greek, barbarian, Scythian, nor if there be any more savage than they, ever changed, but all reverence them, and keep them, and thus they are sacred and venerated by all. But the Demon raises his mask, and with bare head, resists the common laws of nature. For the dead, he says, are a pollution. The dead are not a pollution, a most wicked demon, but a wicked intention is an abomination. But if one must say something startling, the bodies of the living full of evil, are more polluting than those of the dead. For the one minister to the behests of the mind, but the other lie unmoved. Now that which is unmoved, and destitute of all perception would be free from all accusation. Not that I even would say that the bodies of the living are by nature polluting; but that everywhere a wicked and perverted intention is open to accusations from all.

The dead body then is not a pollution O Apollo, but to persecute a maiden who wishes to be modest, and to outrage the dignity of a virgin, and to lament at the failure of the shameless deed, this is worthy of accusation, and punishment. There were at all events, many wonderful and great prophets among ourselves, who spake also many things concerning the future, and they in no case used to bid those who asked them to dig up the bones of the departed. Yea Ezekiel standing near the bones themselves was not only not hindered by them, but added flesh, and nerves and skin to them, and brought them back to life again.³⁸⁵ But the great Moses did not stand near the bones of the dead, but bearing off the whole dead body of Joseph, thus foretold things to come.³⁸⁶ And very reasonably, for their words were the grace of the Holy Spirit. But the words of these, a deceit, and a lie which is no wise able to be concealed. For that these things were an excuse, and pretence and that he feared the blessed Babylas, is manifest from what the emperor did. For leaving all the other dead, he only moved that martyr. And yet if he did these things, in disgust at him, and not in fear, it were necessary that he should order the coffin to be broken, thrown into the sea, carried to the desert, be made to disappear by some other method of destruction; for this is the part of one who is disgusted. Thus God did when he spake to the Hebrews about the abominations of the Gentiles. He bade their statues to be broken, not to bring their abominations from the suburbs to the city.

3. The martyr then was moved, but the demon not even then enjoyed freedom from fear, but straightway learned that it is possible to move the bones of a martyr, but not to escape his hands. For as soon as the coffin was drawn into the city, a thunderbolt came from above upon the head of his image, and burnt it all up. And yet, if not before, then at least there was likelihood that the impious emperor would be angry, and that he would send forth his anger against the testimony of the martyr. But not even then did he dare, so great fear possessed him. But although he saw that the burning was intolerable, and knew the cause accurately; he kept quiet. And this is not only wonderful that he did not destroy the testimony, but that he not even dared to put the roof on to the temple again. For he knew, he knew, that the stroke was divinely sent, and he feared lest by forming

385 Ez. xxxvii.

386 Ex. xiii. 19.

any further plan, he should call down that fire upon his own head. On this account he endured to see the shrine of Apollo brought to so great desolation; For there was no other cause, on account of which he did not rectify that which had happened, but fear alone. For which reason he unwillingly kept quiet, and knowing this left as much reproach to the demon, as distinction to the martyr. For the walls are now standing, instead of trophies, uttering a voice clearer than a trumpet. To those in Daphne, to those in the city, to those who arrive from far off, to those who are with us, to those men which shall be hereafter, they declare everything by their appearance, the wrestling, the struggle, the victory of the martyr. For it is likely that he who dwells far off from the suburb, when he sees the chapel of the saint deprived of a shrine, and the temple of Apollo deprived of its roof would ask the reason of each of these things; and then after learning the whole history would depart hence. Such are the noble deeds of the martyr after death, wherefore I count your city blessed, that ye have shown much zeal about this holy man. For then, when he returned from Daphne, all our city poured forth into the road, and the market places were empty of men, and the houses were empty of women, and the bedchambers were destitute of maidens. Thus also every age and each sex passed forth from the city, as if to receive a father long absent who was returning from sojourn far away. And you indeed gave him back to the band of fellow enthusiasts. But the grace of God did not suffer him to remain there for good, but again removed him beyond the river,³⁸⁷ so that many parts of the country were filled with the sweet savor of the martyr. Neither even when he came hither was he destined to be alone, but he quickly received, a neighbor, and a fellow-lodger, and one of similar life.³⁸⁸ For he shared with him the same dignity, and for the sake of religion shewed forth equal boldness. Wherefore he obtained the same abode as he, this wonderful man being no vain imitator, as it seems, of the martyr. For for so long a time he laboured there, sending letters continually to the emperor, wearying the authorities, and bringing the ministry of the body to bear upon the martyr. For ye know, doubtless, and remember that when the midday summer sun possessed the heaven, he together with his acquaintances, used to walk thither everyday, not as spectator only, but also, as intending to be a sharer in what was going on. For he often handled stone, and dragged a rope, and listened, in advance of the workmen themselves, to one who wanted to erect any building. For he knew, he knew what rewards lie in store for him for these things. And on this account he continued doing service to the martyrs, not only by splendid buildings nor even by continual feasts, but by a better method than these. And what is this? He imitates their life, emulates their courage, throughout according to his ability he keeps the image of the martyrs alive, in himself. For see, they gave their bodies to the slaughter, he has mortified the members of his flesh which are upon the earth. They stopped the flame of fire, he quenched the flame of lust. They fought against the teeth of beasts, but this man bore off the most dangerous of our passions, anger. For all these things let us give thanks to God, because he hath thus granted us noble martyrs, and pastors worthy of martyrs, for

³⁸⁷ Viz., to the church built on the other side of the Orontes, where the reliques of the saint finally remained.

³⁸⁸ Meletius, Bishop of Antioch, a man of very saintly life who died in 379 and was buried by the side of St. Babylas in the church which he had been active in erecting, mentioned in the preceding note.

the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ³⁸⁹ with whom be glory, honor, and might to the Father, with the Holy and lifegiving Spirit, now and always, for ever and ever. Amen.

³⁸⁹ Eph. iv. 12.