

Luke: 5:27–39

From Catena Aurea:

27. And after these things he went forth, and saw a Publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me.

28. And he left all, rose up, and followed him.

29. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of Publicans and of others that sat down with them.

30. But their Scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with Publicans and sinners?

31. And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.

32. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

AUGUSTINE. (de con. Ev. l. ii. c. 26.) After the healing of the sick of the palsy, St. Luke goes on to mention the conversion of a publican, saying, And after these things, he went forth, and saw a publican of the name of Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom. This is Matthew, also called Levi.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. For Levi had been a publican, a rapacious man, of unbridled desires after vain things, a lover of other men's goods, for this is the character of the publican, but snatched from the very worship of malice by Christ's call. Hence it follows, And he said unto him, Follow me. He bids him follow Him, not with bodily step, but with the soul's affections. Matthew therefore, being called by the Word, left his own, who was wont to seize the things of others, as it follows, And having left all, he rose, and followed him.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 30. in Matt.) Here mark both the power of the caller, and the obedience of him that was called. For he neither resisted nor wavered, but forthwith obeyed; and like the fishermen, he did not even wish to go into his own house that he might tell it to his friends.

BASIL. (Reg. fus. tract. 8.) He not only gave up the profits of the customs, but also despised the dangers which might occur to himself and his family from leaving the accounts of the receipts uncompleted.

THEOPHYLACT. And so from him that received toll from the passers by, Christ received toll, not money, but entire devotion to His company.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) But the Lord honoured Levi, whom He had called, by immediately going to his feast. For this testified the greater confidence in him. Hence it follows, And Levi made him a great feast in his own house. Nor did He sit down to meat with him alone, but with many, as it follows, And there was a great company of Publicans and others that sat down with them. For the publicans came to Levi as to their colleague, and a man in the same line with themselves, and he too glorying in the presence of Christ, called them all together. For Christ displayed every sort of remedy, and not only by discoursing and displaying cures, or even by rebuking the envious, but also by eating with them, He corrected the faults of some, thereby giving us a lesson, that every time and occasion brings with it its own profit. But He shunned not the company of Publicans, for the sake of the advantage that might ensue, like a physician, who unless he touch the afflicted part cannot cure the disease.

AMBROSE. For by His eating with sinners, He prevents not us also from going to a banquet with the Gentiles.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) But nevertheless the Lord was blamed by the Pharisees, who were envious, and wished to separate Christ and His disciples, as it follows, And the Pharisees murmured, saying, Why do you eat with Publicans, &c.

AMBROSE. This was the voice of the Devil. This was the first word the Serpent uttered to Eve, Yea hath God said, Ye shall not eat. (Gen. 3:1) So they diffuse the poison of their father.

AUGUSTINE. (de con. Ev. lib. ii. c. 27.) Now St. Luke seems to have related this somewhat different from the other Evangelists. For he does not say that to our Lord alone it was objected that He eat and drank with publicans and sinners, but to the disciples also, that the charge might be understood both of Him and them. But the reason that Matthew and Mark related the objection as made concerning Christ to His disciples, was, that seeing the disciples ate with publicans and sinners, it was the rather objected to their Master as Him whom they followed and imitated; the meaning therefore is the same, yet so much the better conveyed, as while still keeping to the truth, it differs in certain words.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) But our Lord refutes all their charges, shewing, that so far from its being a fault to mix with sinners, it is but a part of His merciful design, as it follows, And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; in which He reminds them of their common infirmities, and shews them that they are of the number of the sick, but adds, He is the Physician. It follows, I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. As if He should say, So far am I from hating sinners, that for their sakes only I came, not that they should remain sinners, but be converted and become righteous.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) Hence He adds, to repentance, which serves well to explain the passage, that no one should suppose that sinners, because they are sinners, are loved by Christ, since that similitude of the sick plainly suggests what our Lord meant by calling sinners, as a Physician, the sick, in order that from iniquity as from sickness they should be saved.

AMBROSE. But how does God love righteousness, and David has never seen the righteous man forsaken, if the righteous are excluded, the sinner called; unless you understand that He meant by the righteous those who boast of the law, (Ps. 11:7, Ps. 37:25.) and seek not the grace of the Gospel. Now no one is justified by the law, but redeemed by grace. He therefore calls not those who call themselves righteous, for the claimers to righteousness are not called to grace. For if grace is from repentance, surely he who despises repentance renounces grace.

AMBROSE. But He calls those sinners, who considering their guilt, and feeling that they cannot be justified by the law, submit themselves by repentance to the grace of Christ.

CHRYSOSTOM. Now He speaks of the righteous ironically, as when He says, Behold Adam is become as one of us. (Gen. 3:22.) But that there was none righteous upon the earth St. Paul shews, saying, All have sinned, and need the grace of God. (Rom. 3:23.)

GREGORY OF NYSSA. Or, He means that the sound and righteous need no physician, i. e. the angels, but the corrupt and sinners, i. e. ourselves do; since we catch the disease of sin, which is not in heaven.

THEOPHYLACT. Or the publican is he who serves the prince of this world, and is debtor to the flesh, to which the glutton gives his food, the adulterer his pleasure, and another something else. But when the Lord saw him sitting at the receipt of custom, and not stirring himself to greater wickedness, He calls him that he might be snatched from the evil, and follow Jesus, and receive the Lord into the house of his soul.

AMBROSE. But he who receives Christ into his inner chamber, is fed with the greatest delights of overflowing pleasures. The Lord therefore willingly enters, and reposes in his affection; but again the envy of the treacherous is kindled, and the form of their future punishment is prefigured; for while all the faithful are feasting in the kingdom of heaven, the faithless will be cast out hungry. Or, by this is denoted the envy of the Jews, who are afflicted at the salvation of the Gentiles.

AMBROSE. At the same time also is shewn the difference between those who are zealous for the law and those who are for grace, that they who follow the law shall suffer eternal hunger of soul, while they who have received the word into the inmost soul, refreshed with abundance of heavenly meat and drink, can neither hunger nor thirst. And so they who fasted in soul murmured.

5:33–39

33. And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?

34. And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?

35. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

36. And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old.

37. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish.

38. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.

39. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. As soon as they have received the first answer from Christ, they proceed from one thing to another, with the intent to shew that the holy disciples, and Jesus Himself with them, cared very little for the law. Hence it follows, Why do the disciples of John fast, but thine eat, &c. (Lev. 15, prævaricationis.) As if they said, Ye eat with publicans and sinners, whereas the law forbids to have any

fellowship with the unclean, but compassion comes in as an excuse for your transgression; why then do ye not fast, as they are wont to do who wish to live according to the law? But holy men indeed fast, that by the mortification of their body they may quell its passions. Christ needed not fasting for the perfecting of virtue, since as God He was free from every yoke of passion. Nor again did His companions need fasting, but being made partakers of His grace without fasting they were strengthened in all holy and godly living. For when Christ fasted for forty days, it was not to mortify His passions, but to manifest to carnal men the rule of abstinence.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Ev. l. ii. c. 27.) Now Luke evidently relates that this was spoken not by men of themselves, but by others concerning them. How then does Matthew say, Then came unto him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast; unless that they themselves also came, and were all eager, as far as they were able, to put the question to Him?

AUGUSTINE. (de Qu. Ev. l. ii. q. 18.) Now there are two fasts, one is in tribulation, to propitiate God for our sins; another in joy, when as carnal things delight us less, we feed the more on things spiritual. The Lord therefore being asked why His disciples did not fast, answered as to each fast. And first of the fast of tribulation; for it follows, And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridegroom fast when the bridegroom is with them?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 30. in Matt.) As if He should say, The present time is one of joy and gladness, sorrow must not then be mixed up with it.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. For the shewing forth of our Saviour in this world was nothing else but a great festival, (πανηγυρις) spiritually uniting our nature to Him as His bride, that she who was formerly barren might become fruitful. The children of the Bridegroom then are found to be those who have been called by Him through a new and evangelical discipline, but not the Scribes and Pharisees, who observe only the shadow of the law.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Ev. ii. c. 27.) Now this which Luke alone mentions, Ye cannot make the children of the bridegroom fast, is understood to refer to those very men who said that they would make the children of the Bridegroom mourn and fast, since they were about to kill the Bridegroom.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. Having granted to the children of the Bridegroom that it was not fitting that they should be troubled, as they were keeping a spiritual feast, but that fasting should be abolished among

them, He adds as a direction, But the days shall come when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

AUGUSTINE. (de Qu. Ev. ii. qu. 18.) As if He said, Then shall they be desolate, and in sorrow and lamentation, until the joy of consolation shall be restored to them by the Holy Spirit.

AMBROSE. Or, That fast is not given up whereby the flesh is mortified, and the desires of the body chastened. (For this fast commends us to God.) But we cannot fast who have Christ, and banquet on the flesh and blood of Christ.

BASIL. The children of the Bridegroom also cannot fast, i. e. refuse nourishment to the soul, but live on every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

AMBROSE. But when are those days, in which Christ shall be taken away from us, since He has said, I will be with you alway, even unto the end of the world? But no one can take Christ away from you, unless you take yourself away from Him.

AMBROSE. Lastly, it is spoken of the fast of the soul, as the context shews, for it follows, But he said, No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old. He calleth fasting an old garment, which the Apostle thought should be taken off, saying, Put off the old man with his deeds. (Col. 3:9.) In the same manner we have a series of precepts not to mix up the actions of the old and new man.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) Or else, The gift of the Holy Spirit being received, there is a kind of fast, which is of joy, which they who are already renewed to a spiritual life most seasonably celebrate. Before they receive this gift, He says they are as old garments, to which a new piece of cloth is most unsuitably sewed on, i. e. any part of the doctrine which relates to the soberness of the new life; for if this takes place, the very doctrine itself also is in a measure divided, for it teaches a general fast not from pleasant food only, but from all delight in temporal pleasures, the part of which that appertains to food He said ought not to be given to men still devoted to their old habits, for therein seems to be a rent, and it agreeth not with the old. He says also, that they are like to old skins, as it follows, And no one putteth wine into old skins.

AMBROSE. The weakness of man's condition is exposed when our bodies are compared to the skins of dead animals.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) But the Apostles are compared to old skins, who are more easily burst with new wine, i. e. with spiritual precepts, than contain them. Hence it follows, Else the new wine will burst the

skins, and the wine will be spilled. But they were new skins at that time, when after the ascension of the Lord they received the Holy Spirit, when from desire of His consolation they were renewed by prayer and hope. Hence it follows, But the new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (Orat. de Deit. Filii et SS.) For wine newly drawn forth, evaporates on account of the natural heat in the liquor, throwing off from itself the scum by natural action. Such wine is the new covenant, which the old skins because of their unbelief contain not, and are therefore burst by the excellence of the doctrine, and cause the grace of the Spirit to flow in vain; because into an evil soul wisdom will not enter. (Sap. 1:4.)

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

5:27–28 Levi’s Call to Discipleship

Levi the Publican Called to Follow Jesus.

Cyril of Alexandria: Levi was a publican, a man greedy for dirty money, filled with an uncontrolled desire to possess, careless of justice in his eagerness to have what did not belong to him. Such was the character of the publicans. Yet he was snatched from the workshop of sin itself and saved when there was no hope for him, at the call of Christ the Savior of us all. For Jesus said to him, “ ‘Follow me.’ And he left all and followed him.” What most wise Paul says is true: “that Christ came to save sinners.” Do you see how the only-begotten Word of God, having taken upon him the flesh, transferred to himself the devil’s goods? Commentary on Luke, Homily 12.

5:29–32 Levi’s Feast and Jesus’ First Response to Pharisees and Scribes

The Feast with Levi Awakens His Faith.

Ambrose: Then follows the spiritual calling of the tax collector, whom he orders to follow him not by steps of the body but by character of the mind. Matthew once greedily embezzled from fishermen the profits they earned from hard labor and dangers. When he was called, he abandoned his office, which was to rob others of their money. Yes, he left that shameful seat, to walk totally in the footsteps of the Lord with his mind. He also prepared a great feast, because he who receives Christ in the house inside him eats the

finest foods—plentiful pleasures. So the Lord enters willingly and reclines in the character of one who has believed. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 5.16.

Envy and Fault Finding Motivate the Pharisees.

Cyril of Alexandria: But for what reason do the Pharisees blame the Savior for eating with sinners? Because it was the law to distinguish between the holy and the profane, that is, holy things were not to be brought into contact with things profane. They made the accusation therefore as if they were vindicating the law. Yet it really was envy against the Lord and readiness to find fault. But he shows them that he is present now, not as a judge but as a physician. He performs a proper function of the physician's office, being in the company of those in need to be healed. But no sooner had they received an explanation of their first accusation than they bring forward another, finding fault because his disciples did not fast. They wished to use this charge as an opportunity to accuse Christ. Commentary on Luke, Homilies 21–22.

To Receive Christ is to Prepare a Banquet of Good Works.

Ambrose: People are hungry when Christ is absent and they lack the abundance of good desserts. Truly, one for whom his own virtue suffices for pleasure, who receives Christ in his own home, prepares a great feast. It is a spiritual banquet of good works, at which the rich people go without and the poor one feasts. It says, "The sons of the Bridegroom cannot fast while the Bridegroom is with them." Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 5.19.

5:33–35 Jesus' Second Response to Pharisees and Scribes

The Bridegroom is Always with Us at the Lord's Supper.

Ambrose: "But the days will come when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them." Which are these days in which Christ is taken from us, especially when he himself has said, "I shall be with you, even to the end of the world," when he has said, "I will not leave you orphans"? For it is certain that if he were to leave us, we could not be saved. None can take Christ from you, unless you take yourself away. Your boasting will not take you away, nor arrogance, nor may you presume on the law for yourself. "For he came not to call the righteous, but sinners." ... The righteous are those who do not strike him who strikes them, who love their enemy. If we do not endure thus, the opposite is found. "I came not to call the righteous." Christ does not call those who say they are righteous, for not knowing God and seeking to establish their own

righteousness, they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. Therefore the usurpers of righteousness are not called to grace. For if grace comes from penitence, surely one who scorns penitence renounces grace. Those who make themselves out to be holy will be wounded. The Bridegroom is taken from them. Neither Caiaphas nor Pilate took Christ from us. We cannot fast, because we have Christ, and we feast on the body and blood of Christ. For how does he who does not hunger seem to fast? How does he who does not thirst seem to fast? Then, how can he who drinks Christ thirst when he himself said, "Whosoever shall drink of the water that I will give him shall be thirsty no more"? Then what follows will declare the saying to concern the fasting of the spirit. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 5.20–22.

Why the Disciples are Called Bridal Guests.

Ephrem the Syrian: During the entire period that our Lord was in the midst of the world, he compared it with a bridal chamber and himself with the bridegroom. For the bridal guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them. ...

He called his disciples bridal guests because they are members of the church, and ministers of the feast, and heralds who invite those who sit at table. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 5.22a–22b.

Fasting Refers to the Old Garment Put Off in Baptism.

Ambrose: Then in this passage, fasting represents the old garment that the apostle thought should be taken off. He said, "Strip yourselves of the old man with his deeds," so that we may put on the new man, which is renewed by the sanctification of baptism. Then the series of teachings is suited to the same garment, lest we mix the deeds of the old and the new man, when the physical exterior performs the works of the flesh. The inner man, which is reborn, should not have the varied appearance of old and new actions but be the same color as Christ. With zeal of mind, it should imitate him for whom he was cleansed by baptism. So let the discolored coverings of the mind, which are displeasing to the Bridegroom, be absent, for one who has not a wedding garment is displeasing to him. What can please the Bridegroom, except peace of spirit, purity of heart and clarity of mind? Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 5.23.

To Be Taken Away is to Ascend into Heaven.

Cyril of Alexandria: For all things are good in their season, but what is the meaning of the Bridegroom being taken away from them? It is his being taken up into heaven. Commentary on Luke, Homilies 21–22.

5:36–39 Jesus' Summary Parables Epitomize the Scene

No Share in the New Creation.

Cyril of Alexandria: Those who live according to the law cannot receive the institutions of Christ. These institutions cannot be admitted into the hearts of such as have not as yet received the renewing by the Holy Spirit. The Lord shows this by saying that a tattered patch cannot be put upon a new garment, nor can old skins hold new wine. The first covenant has grown old, nor was it free from fault. Those, therefore, who adhere to it and keep at heart the antiquated commandment have no share in the new order of things in Christ. In him all things are become new, but their mind being decayed, they have no harmony or point of mutual agreement with the ministers of the new covenant. Commentary on Luke, Homilies 21–22.