

Luke: 11:27–36

From Catena Aurea:

27. And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.

28. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 44. in Matt.) In this answer He sought not to disown His mother, but to shew that His birth would have profited her nothing, had she not been really fruitful in works and faith. But if it profited Mary nothing that Christ derived His birth from her, without the inward virtue of her heart, much less will it avail us to have a virtuous father, brother, or son, while we ourselves are strangers to virtue.

11:29–32

29. And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet.

30. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.

31. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them; for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

32. The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

AMBROSE. That you may know that the people of the Synagogue are treated with dishonour, while the blessedness of the Church is increased. But as Jonas was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of man be to the Jews. Hence it is added, They seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given them but the sign of Jonas the prophet.

BASIL. (in Esai. 7.) A sign is a thing brought openly to view, containing in itself the manifestation of something hidden, as the sign of Jonas represents the descent to hell, the ascension of Christ, and His resurrection from the dead. Hence it is added, For as Jonas was a sign to the Ninevites, so shall also the

Son of man be to this generation. He gives them a sign, not from heaven, because they were unworthy to see it, but from the lowest depths of hell; a sign, namely, of His incarnation, not of His divinity; of His passion, not of His glorification.

AMBROSE. Now as the sign of Jonas is a type of our Lord's passion, so also is it a testimony of the grievous sins which the Jews have committed. We may remark at once both the mighty voice of warning, and the declaration of mercy. For by the example of the Ninevites both a punishment is denounced, and a remedy promised. Hence even the Jews ought not to despair of pardon, if they will but practise repentance.

THEOPHYLACT. Now Jonas after he came forth from the whale's belly converts the men of Nineveh by his preaching, but when Christ rose again, the Jewish nation believed not. So there was a sentence already passed upon them, of which there follows a second example, as it is said, The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them.

AMBROSE. Herein also while condemning the Jewish people, He strongly expresses the mystery of the Church, which in the queen of the South, through the desire of obtaining wisdom, is gathered together from the uttermost parts of the whole earth, to hear the words of the Peacemaking Solomon; a queen plainly whose kingdom is undivided, rising up from different and distant nations into one body.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (Hom. 7. Cant.) Now as she was queen of the Ethiopians, and in a far distant country, so in the beginning the Church of the Gentiles was in darkness, and far off from the knowledge of God. But when Christ the Prince of peace shone forth, the Jews being still in darkness, thither came the Gentiles, and offered to Christ the frankincense of piety, the gold of divine knowledge, and precious stones, that is, obedience to His commands.

THEOPHYLACT. Or because the South is praised in Scripture as warm and life-giving, therefore the soul reigning in the south, that is, in all spiritual conversation, comes to hear the wisdom of Solomon, the Prince of peace, the Lord our God, (i. e. is raised up to contemplate Him,) to whom no one shall come except he reign in a good life. But He brings next an example from the Ninevites, saying, The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it.

CHRYSOSTOM. (non occ.) The judgment of condemnation comes from men like or unlike to those who are condemned. From like, for instance, as in the parable of the ten virgins, but from unlike, when the Ninevites condemn those who lived at the time of Christ, that so their condemnation might be the more remarkable. (Hom. 43. in Matt.). For the Ninevites indeed were barbarians, but these Jews. The one

enjoying the prophetic teaching, the other having never received the divine word. To the former came a servant, to the latter the Master, of whom the one foretold destruction, the other preached the kingdom of heaven. To all men then was it known that the Jews ought rather to have believed, but the contrary happened; therefore he adds, For they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

AMBROSE. Now in a mystery, the Church consists of two things, either ignorance of sin, which has reference mainly to the queen of the South, or ceasing to sin, which relates indeed to the repentant Ninevites. For repentance blots out the offence, wisdom guards against it.

AUGUSTINE. (de Cons. Ev. lib. ii. c. 39.) Luke indeed relates this in the same place as Matthew, but in a somewhat different order. But who does not see that it is an idle question, in what order our Lord said those things, seeing that we ought to learn by the most precious authority of the Evangelist, that there is no falsehood. But not every man will repeat another's words in the same order in which they proceeded from his mouth, seeing that the order itself makes no difference with respect to the fact, whether it be so or not.

11:33–36

33. No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light.

34. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness.

35. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.

36. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. The Jews said, that our Lord performed His miracles not for faith, i. e. that they might believe on Him, but to gain the applause of the spectators, i. e. that He might have more followers. He refutes therefore this calumny, saying, No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick.

AMBROSE. Either faith is the light, as it is written, Thy word, O Lord, is a lantern to my feet. (Ps. 119:105.) For the word of God is our faith. But a lantern cannot shine except it has received its quality from

something else. Hence also the powers of our mind and senses are enlightened, that the piece of money which had been lost may be found. Let no one then place faith under the law, for the law is bound by certain limits, grace is unlimited; the law obscures, grace makes clear.

THEOPHYLACT. Or else, because the Jews, seeing the miracles, accused them out of the malice of their heart, therefore our Lord tells them, that, receiving the light, that is, their understanding, from God, they were so darkened with envy, as not to recognise His miracles and mercies. But to this end received we our understanding from God, that we should place it upon a candlestick, that others also who are entering in may see the light. The wise man indeed has already entered, but the learner is still walking. As if He said to the Pharisees, You ought to use your understanding to know the miracles, and declare them to others, seeing that what you see are the works not of Beelzebub, but the Son of God. Therefore, keeping up the meaning, He adds, The light of the body is the eye.

ORIGEN. For He gives the name of the eye especially to our understanding, but the whole soul, although not corporeal, He metaphorically calls the body. For the whole soul is enlightened by the understanding.

THEOPHYLACT. But as if the eye of the body be light the body will be light, but if dark the body will be dark also, so is it with the understanding in relation to the soul. Hence it follows, If thine eye be single, thy whole body will be full of light; but if evil, thy whole body will be full of darkness.

ORIGEN. For the understanding from its very beginning desires only singleness, containing no dissimulation, or guile, or division in itself.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 20. in Matt.) If then we have corrupted the understanding, which is able to let loose the passions, we have done violence to the whole soul, and suffer dreadful darkness, being blinded by the perversion of our understanding. Therefore adds he, Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness. He speaks of a darkness which may be perceived, but which has its origin within itself, and which we every where carry about with us, the eye of the soul being put out. Concerning the power of this light He goes on to say, If thy whole body therefore be full of light, &c. &c.

ORIGEN. That is, If thy material body, when the light of a candle shines upon it, is made full of light, so that not one of thy members is any longer in darkness; much more when thou sinnest not, shall thy whole spiritual body be so full of light, that its brightness may be compared to the shining of a candle, while the light which was in the body, and which used to be darkness, is directed whithersoever the understanding may command.

GREGORY NAZIANZEN. (Epist. 41.) Or else; The light and eye of the Church is the Bishop. It is necessary then that as the body is rightly directed as long as the eye keeps itself pure, but goes wrong when it becomes corrupt, so also with respect to the Prelate, according to what his state may be, must the Church in like manner suffer shipwreck, or be saved.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

11:27–28 Blessings for Hearing and Keeping the Word

Mary Blessed by Faith.

Augustine: Mary was more blessed in accepting the faith of Christ than in conceiving the flesh of Christ. To someone who said, “Blessed is the womb that bore you,” he replied, “Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.”

Finally, for his brothers, his relatives according to the flesh who did not believe in him, of what advantage was that relationship? Even her maternal relationship would have done Mary no good unless she had borne Christ more happily in her heart than in her flesh. Holy Virginitv 3.

Those Who Worship Jesus are Blessed.

Ephrem the Syrian: “Blessed is the womb that bore you.” He took blessedness from the one who bore him and gave it to those who were worshipping him. It was with Mary for a certain time, but it would be with those who worshiped him for eternity. “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.” Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron 11.10.

11:29–32 Like Jonah, Jesus is a Sign

The Sign of Jonah.

Cyril of Alexandria: He will not grant you another sign, so that he may give holy things to dogs or throw pearls before swine....

He said only the sign of Jonah will be given to them. This means the passion on the cross and the resurrection from the dead. Commentary on Luke, Homily 82.

A Sign for the Fall and Rising of Many in Israel.

Ephrem the Syrian: The sign of Jonah served the Ninevites in two ways. If they would have rejected it, they would have gone down to Sheol alive like Jonah, but they were raised from the dead like him because they repented. Just as in the case of our Lord, who was set for the fall and the rising of many, people either lived through his being killed or died through his death.... They were asking him for a sign from heaven like thunder.... Jonah, after he went up from within the fish, was a negative sign to the Ninevites, because he proclaimed the destruction of their city. The disciples were also this way after the resurrection of our Lord. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 11.2.

The Queen of the South is a Type of the Church.

Ephrem the Syrian: The Queen of the South will condemn it because she is a type of the church. Just as she came to Solomon, so too the church came to our Lord, and just as she condemned this generation, so also will the church. If she, who wished to see wisdom that passes away and a king who was mortal, was judging the synagogue, how much more the church, which desires to see a king who does not pass away and wisdom which does not go astray, will judge? If we suffer with him, we will also be glorified with him. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 11.4.

The Mystery of Christ and His Church.

Ambrose: The mystery of the church is clearly expressed. Her flocks stretch from the boundaries of the whole world. They stretch to Nineveh through penitence and to the Queen of the South through zeal to obtain wisdom. Thus it may know the words of the peaceable Solomon. The queen's kingdom is undivided and rises from diverse and distant peoples to one body. That great sacrament is concerning Christ and the church, but this is nevertheless greater because of what prefigured it. The mystery is now fulfilled in truth. There was the image of Solomon, but here is Christ in his own body. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 7.96.

11:33–36 The Eye Illuminates the Body

Christ is the Lamp and His Church the Lampstand.

Cyril of Alexandria: He says that a lamp is always elevated and put on a stand to be of use to those who see. Let us consider the inference that follows from this. Before the coming of our Savior, the father of darkness, Satan, made the world dark and blackened all things with an intellectual gloom. In this state of affairs, the Father gave us the Son to be a lamp to the world, to illumine us with divine light and to rescue us from satanic darkness. Since you blame the lamp because it is not hidden but on the contrary is being set high on a stand and gives its light to those who see, then blame Christ for not wishing to be concealed. On the contrary, he wishes to be seen by all, illuminating those in darkness and shedding on them the light of the true knowledge of God. He did not fulfill his miracles so much in order to be wondered at or to become famous. He did miracles so we might believe that although he is God by nature, yet he became man for our sakes, but without ceasing to be what he was. The holy church is like a lampstand, shining by the doctrine he proclaims. He gives light to the minds of all by filling them with divine knowledge. Commentary on Luke, Homily 82.

Faith Must Not Be Hidden Under the Law.

Ambrose: The Word of God is our faith. The Word of God is the light, and faith is the lamp. "That was the true Light, that enlightens everyone that comes into this world." The lamp cannot shine unless it has received light from elsewhere. The lamp that is lit is the virtue and perception of our mind, so that the woman can find the coin that she lost. No one finds faith beneath the law, for the law is within a bushel basket. Grace is outside. The law overshadows, but faith illumines. No one conceals his faith within the bushel basket of the law but brings it to the church in which shines the sevenfold grace of the Spirit. ... The church standing on the highest mountain of all, that is, on Christ, cannot be hidden in the darkness and ruins of this world. Shining with the splendor of the eternal Sun, it enlightens us with the light of spiritual grace. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 7.98–99.

The Mind of Christ that Illumines the Whole Body.

Symeon the New Theologian: What else does he mean by "the eye" than simply the mind, which will never become simple unless it contemplates the simple light? The simple light is Christ. He who has his light shining in his mind is said to have the mind of Christ. When your light is this simple, then the whole

immaterial body of your soul will be full of light. If the mind is evil, that is, darkened and extinguished, then this body of yours will be full of darkness....

We say, "See to it, brothers, that while we seem to be in God and think that we have communion with him we should not be found excluded and separated from him, since we do not now see his light." If that light had kindled our lamps, that is, our souls, it would shine brightly in us. Our God and Lord Jesus Christ said, "If your whole body is full of life, having no dark part, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light." What other witness greater than this shall we adduce to make the matter clear to you? If you disbelieve the Master, how will you, tell me, believe your fellow servant? Discourses 33.2.