

Luke 7: 28-35

From Catena Aurea:

28. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. (ubi sup.) The Lord, knowing the secrets of men, foresaw that some would say, If until now John is ignorant of Jesus, how did he shew Him to us, saying, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world? To quench therefore this feeling which had taken possession of them, He prevented the injury which might arise from the offence, as it follows, And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, what went ye out for to see? A reed shaken in the wind? As if He said, Ye marvelled at John the Baptist, and oftentimes came to see him, passing over long journeys in the desert; surely in vain, if you think him so fickle as to be like a reed bending down whichever way the wind moves it. For such he appeal's to be, who lightly avows his ignorance of the things which he knows.

TITUS BOSTRENSIS. (non occ.) But you went not out into the desert, (where there is no pleasantness,) leaving your cities, except as caring for this man.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Simeon) Now these things were spoken by our Lord after the departure of John's disciples, for He would not utter the praises of the Baptist while they were present, lest His words should be counted as those of a flatterer.

AMBROSE. Not unmeaningly then is the character of John praised there, who preferred the way of righteousness to the love of life, and swerved not through fear of death. For this world seems to be compared to a desert, into which, as yet barren and uncultivated, the Lord says we must not so enter as to regard men puffed up with a fleshly mind, and devoid of inward virtue, and vaunting themselves in the heights of frail worldly glory, as a kind of example and model for our imitation. And such being exposed to the storms of this world, and tossed to and fro by a restless life, are rightly compared to a reed.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (ubi sup.) We have also an infallible testimony to John's way of life in his manner of clothing, and his imprisonment, into which he never would have been cast had he known how to court princes; as it follows, But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed with soft raiment? Behold they

who are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings' houses. By being clothed with soft raiment, he signifies men who live luxuriously.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 29. in ep. ad Heb.) But a soft garment relaxes the austerity of the soul; and if worn by a hard and rigorous body, soon, by such effeminacy, makes it frail and delicate. But when the body becomes softer, the soul must also share the injury; for generally its workings correspond with the conditions of the body.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. (ubi sup.) How then could a religious strictness, so great that it subdued to itself all fleshly lusts, sink down to such ignorance, except from a frivolity of mind, which is not fostered by austerities, but by worldly delights. If then ye imitate John, as one who cared not for pleasure, award him also the strength of mind, which befits his continence. But if strictness no more tends to this than a life of luxury, why do you, not respecting those who live delicately, admire the inhabitant of the desert, and his wretched garment of camel's hair.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 37. in Matt.) By each of these sayings He shews John to be neither naturally nor easily shaken or diverted from any purpose.

AMBROSE. And although very many become effeminate by the use of softer garments, yet here other garments seem to be meant, namely, our mortal bodies, by which our souls are clothed. Again, luxurious acts and habits are soft garments, but those whose languid limbs are wasted away in luxuries are shut out of the kingdom of heaven, whom the rulers of this world and of darkness have taken captive. For these are the kings who exercise tyranny over those who are their fellows in their own works.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. (ubi sup.) But perhaps it does not concern us to excuse John upon this ground, for you confess that he is worthy of imitation, hence He adds, But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Verily I say unto you, more than a prophet. For the prophets foretold that Christ would come, but John not only foretold that He would come, but also declared Him to be present, saying, Behold the Lamb of God.

AMBROSE. Indeed, greater than a prophet (or more than a prophet) was he in whom the prophets terminate; for many desired to see Him whom he saw, whom he baptized.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. (ubi sup.) Having then described his character by the place where he dwelt, by his clothing, and from the crowds who went to see him, He introduces the testimony of the prophet, saying, This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my angel. (Mal. 3:1.)

TITUS BOSTRENSIS. He calls a man an angel, not because he was by nature an angel, for he was by nature a man, but because he exercised the office of an angel, in heralding the advent of Christ.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (ubi sup.) But by the words which follow, Before thy face, he signifies nearness of time, for John appeared to men close to the coming of Christ. Wherefore must he indeed be considered more than a prophet, for those also who in battle fight close to the sides of kings, are their most distinguished and greatest friends.

AMBROSE. But he prepared the way of the Lord not only in the order of birth according to the flesh, and as the messenger of faith, but also as the forerunner of His glorious passion. Hence it follows, Who shall prepare thy way before thee.

AMBROSE. But if Christ also is a prophet, how is this man greater than all. But it is said, among those born of woman, not of a virgin. For He was greater than those, whose equal he might be in way of birth, as it follows, For I say unto you, of those that are born of woman, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) The voice of the Lord is indeed sufficient to bear testimony to John's pre-eminence among men. But any one will find the real facts of the case confirming the same, by considering his food, his manner of life, the loftiness of his mind. For he dwelt on earth as one who had come down from heaven, casting no care upon his body, his mind raised up to heaven, and united to God alone, taking no thought for worldly things; his conversation grave and gentle, for with the Jewish people he dealt honestly and zealously, with the king boldly, with his own disciples mildly. He did nothing idle or trifling, but all things becomingly.

ISIDORE OF PELEUSIUM. (lib. I. Ep. 33.) John was also greatest among those that are born of women, because he prophesied from the very womb of his mother, and though in darkness, was not ignorant of the light which had already come.

AMBROSE. Lastly, so impossible is it that there should be any comparison between John and the Son of God, that he is counted even below the angels; as it follows, But he that is least in the kingdom of God, is greater than he.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) For He adds this, that the abundant praise of John might not give the Jews a pretext to prefer John to Christ. But do not suppose that he spoke comparatively of His being greater than John.

AMBROSE. For He is of another nature, which bears not comparison with human kind. For there can be no comparing of God with men.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. But in a mystery, when shewing the superiority of John among those that are born of women, he places in opposition something greater, namely, Himself who was born by the holy Spirit the Son of God. For the kingdom of the Lord is the Spirit of God. Although then as respects works and holiness, we may be inferior to those who attained unto the mystery of the law, whom John represents, yet through Christ we have greater things, being made partakers of the Divine nature.

7:29–35

29. And all the people that heard him, and the Publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.

30. But the Pharisees and Lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.

31. And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like?

32. They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.

33. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil.

34. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of Publicans and sinners!

35. But wisdom is justified of all her children.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 37. in Matt.) Having declared the praises of John, he next exposes the great fault of the Pharisees and lawyers, who would not after the publicans receive the baptism of John. Hence it is said, And all the people that heard him, and the Publicans, justified God.

AMBROSE. God is justified by baptism, wherein men justify themselves confessing their sins. For he that sins and confesses his sin unto God, justifies God, submitting himself to Him who overcometh, and hoping for grace from Him; God therefore is justified by baptism, in which there is confession and pardon of sin.

AMBROSE. Let us not then despise (as the Pharisees did) the counsel of God, which is in the baptism of John, that is, the counsel which the Angel of great counsel searches out. (Is. 9:6. LXX.) No one despises the counsel of man. Who then shall reject the counsel of God?

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. There was a certain play among the Jewish children of this kind. A company of boys were collected together, who, mocking the sudden changes in the affairs of this life, some of them sang, some mourned, but the mourners did not rejoice with those that rejoiced, nor did those who rejoiced fall in with those that wept. They then rebuked each other in turn with the charge of want of sympathy. That such were the feelings of the Jewish people and their rulers, Christ implied in the following words, spoken in the person of Christ; Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like? They are like to children sitting in the market-place.

AMBROSE. But the prophets sung, repeating in spiritual strains their oracles of the common salvation; they wept, soothing with mournful dirges the hard hearts of the Jews. The songs were not sung in the market-place, nor in the streets, but in Jerusalem. For that is the Lord's forum, in which the laws of His heavenly precepts are framed.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (Hom. 6. in Eccl.) But singing and lamentation are nothing else but the breaking forth, the one indeed of joy, the other of sorrow. Now at the sound of a tune played upon a musical instrument, man by the concordant beating of his feet, and motion of his body, portrays his inward feelings. Hence he says, We have sung, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.

AUGUSTINE. (de Quæst. Ev. l. ii. q. 11.) Now these words have reference to John and Christ. For when he says, We have mourned, and ye have not wept, it is in allusion to John, whose abstinence from meat and drink signified penitential sorrow; and hence he adds in explanation, For John came neither eating bread, nor drinking wine, and ye say he hath a devil.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. They take upon themselves to slander a man worthy of all admiration. They say that he who mortifies the law of sin which is in his members hath a devil.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) But his words, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced, refer to the Lord Himself, who by using meats and drinks as others did, represented the joy of His kingdom. Hence it follows, The Son of man came eating and drinking, &c.

TITUS BOSTRENSIS. For Christ would not abstain from this food, lest He should give a handle to heretics, who say that the creatures of God are bad, and blame flesh and wine.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. But where could they point out the Lord as gluttonous? For Christ is found everywhere repressing excess, and leading men to temperance. But He associated with publicans and sinners. Hence they said against Him, He is a friend of Publicans and sinners, though He could in no wise fall into sin, but on the contrary was to them the cause of salvation. For the sun is not polluted though sending its rays over all the earth, and frequently falling upon unclean bodies. Neither will the Sun of righteousness be hurt by associating with the bad. But let no one attempt to place his own condition on a level with Christ's greatness, but let each considering his own infirmity avoid having dealing with such men, for "evil communications corrupt good manners." It follows, And wisdom is justified of all her children.

AMBROSE. The Son of God is wisdom, by nature, not by growth, which is justified by baptism, when it is not rejected through obstinacy, but through righteousness is acknowledged the gift of God. Herein then is the justification of God, if he seems to transfer His gifts not to the unworthy and guilty, but to those who are through baptism holy and just.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. in Ps. 108.) But by the children of wisdom, He means the wise. For Scripture is accustomed to indicate the bad rather by their sin than their name, but to call the good the children of the virtue which characterizes them.

AMBROSE. He well says, of all, for justice is reserved for all, that the faithful may be taken up, the unbelievers cast out.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) Or, when he says, wisdom is justified of all her children, he shews that the children of wisdom understand that righteousness consists neither in abstaining from nor eating food, but in patiently enduring want. For not the use of such things, but the coveting after them, must be blamed; only let a man adapt himself to the kind of food of those with whom he lives.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

7:28 The Witness of Jesus About John

Greatness in the Kingdom by Faith.

Cyril of Alexandria: There were certain people who prided themselves upon their performance of what was required by the law, namely, the scribes, Pharisees, and others of their party. He proves that those who believe in him are superior to them and that the glories of the followers of the law are small in

comparison with the evangelical way of life. He uses as an example him who was the best of their whole class yet born of woman, the blessed Baptizer. He affirmed that he is a prophet, or rather above the measure of the prophets. Christ also says that among those born of women no one had arisen greater than him in the righteousness that is by the law. He declares that he who is small, who falls short of his measure, and is inferior to him in the righteousness that is by the law, is greater than he. He is not greater in legal righteousness but in the kingdom of God, in faith and the glories which result from faith. Faith crowns those that receive it with glories that surpass the law....

For this reason, Jesus brings the blessed Baptizer to our attention as one who had attained the foremost place in legal righteousness and to incomparable praise. Still he is ranked as less than one who is least. He says, "The least is greater than he in the kingdom of God." The kingdom of God signifies, as we affirm, the grace that is by faith, by means of which we are accounted worthy of every blessing and of the possession of the rich gifts which come from above from God. It frees us from all blame and makes us to be the children of God, partakers of the Holy Spirit and heirs of a heavenly inheritance. Commentary on Luke, Homily 38.

John the Greatest Prophet Born of a Woman; Jesus the Greatest Born of a Virgin.

Ambrose: He is even greater than he of whom Moses said, "The Lord our God will stir up a prophet among you," and "For the time will come that every soul that shall not hear that same prophet shall be destroyed from among the people." If Christ is a prophet, then how is John greater than all prophets? Surely we do not deny that Christ is a prophet? On the contrary, I maintain both that the Lord is the Prophet of prophets and that John is greater than all, but of those born of a woman, not of a virgin. He was greater than those to whom he could be equal in the condition of birth. Another nature is not to be compared with human generations. There can be no comparison between man and God, for each is preferred to his own. There could be no comparison of John with the Son of God, so that he is thought to be below the angels. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 5.110.

Born of Woman or Born of God.

Cyril of Alexandria: "What then did you go out to see?" Perhaps you say, "A prophet." Yes, I agree. He is a saint and a prophet. He even surpasses the dignity of a prophet. Not only did he announce before that I am coming but pointed me out close at hand, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God that bears the sin of the world." The prophet's voice testified of him as the one who was sent before my face to prepare the way before me. I witness that there has not arisen among those born of women one greater than he. He that

is least, in the life according to the law, in the kingdom of God is greater than he. How and in what manner is he greater? In that the blessed John, together with as many as preceded him, was born of woman, but they who have received the faith are no longer called the sons of women, but as the wise Evangelist said, “are born of God.” Commentary on Luke, Homily 38.

7:29–30 The People Who Accept and Reject God’s Plan of Salvation

God is Justified Through Baptism.

Ambrose: God himself is justified through baptism, but people justify themselves by confessing their sins, as it is written, “First confess your transgressions, that you may be justified.” One is justified because the gift of God is not rejected through stubbornness but acknowledged through righteousness. “The Lord is righteous and has loved righteousness.” The justification of God is in those who see him to have bestowed his gifts not on the unworthy and the guilty but on the righteous and those made guiltless by baptism. Let us then justify the Lord that we may be justified by the Lord. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 6.2.

7:31–35 Judgment on Those Who Reject God’s Plan

Jewish Leaders the Men of This Generation.

Cyril of Alexandria: The prophet’s words will apply to us, “Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil. Who call bitter sweet and sweet bitter. Who put light for darkness, and darkness for light.” This was the character of the Israelites and especially of those who were their chiefs, the scribes, namely, and Pharisees. Christ said about them, “To what shall I liken the men of this generation?” Commentary on Luke, Homily 39.

The Songs and Dances of the Prophets.

Ambrose: “Therefore, wisdom is justified by all her children.” He fittingly says “by all,” because justice is preserved around all. In order that an acceptance of the faithful may happen, a rejection of the unbelieving must occur. Very many Greeks say this, “Wisdom is justified by all her works,” because the duty of justice is to preserve the measure around the merit of each. It aptly says, “We have piped to you, and you have not danced.” Moses sang a song when he stopped the flow in the Red Sea for the crossing of the Jews, and the same waves encircled the horses of the Egyptians and, falling back, drowned their riders. Isaiah sang a song of his beloved’s vineyard, signifying that the people who before had been fruitful with abundant virtues would be desolate through shameful acts. The Hebrews sang a song when the soles of their feet grew moist at the touch of the bedewing flame, and while all burned within and without, the

harmless fire caressed them alone and did not scorch. Habakkuk also learned to assuage universal grief with a song and prophesied that the sweet passion of the Lord would happen for the faithful. The prophets sang songs with spiritual measures, resounding with prophecies of universal salvation. The prophets wept, softening the hard hearts of the Jews with sorrowful lamentations. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 6.6–7.

A Child's Game.

Cyril of Alexandria: There may have been perchance a sort of game among the Jewish children, something of this kind. A group of youths was divided into two parts. One made fun of the confusion in the world, the uneven course of its affairs, and the painful and rapid change from one extreme to the other, by playing some of them on instruments of music. The other group wailed. Neither did the mourners share the merriment of those who were playing music and rejoicing, nor did those with the instruments of music join in the sorrow of those who were weeping. Finally, they rebuked one another with their lack of sympathy, so to speak, and absence of affection. The one party would say, "We have played unto you, and you have not danced." The others would respond, "We have wailed to you, and you have not wept." Commentary on Luke, Homily 39.

Wisdom is Justified by All Her Children.

Augustine: The Lord made a truly necessary addition to these words when he said, "And wisdom is justified by her children." If you ask who those children are, read what is written, "The sons of wisdom are the church of the just." Letter 36.