Notes Class #1

Romans 1-2

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One note that I believe is significant to mention before we begin with the actual text. That we see at the beginning of St. John Chrysostom's commentary on Romans that in the early Church, at least in Chrysostom's time and place, we see that there was no daily Mass, but rather the Saturday/Sunday Synaxes, and then only extra services for a distinguished feast. "As I keep hearing the Epistles of the blessed Paul read, and that twice every week, and often three or four times, whenever we are celebrating the memorials of the holy martyrs, gladly do I enjoy the spiritual trumpet..."

But one more thing in St. John's introduction to Romans must be mentioned, That "from ignorance of the Scriptures our countless evils have arisen; from this it is that the plague of heresies has broken out; from this that there are negligent lives; from this comes labors without any advantage attached." and hence the need for the study of Scriptures, as we are gathered here ourselves to do. What is interesting also, is that St. John Chrysostom says "And so you also, if you are willing to apply to the reading of him (St. Paul) with a ready mind, will need no other aid. But what is a "ready mind" but that which is well versed in the Fathers of the Church and the Doctrines which have been established. Therefore, we also back up our study with the Fathers, so that all may be able to go home and read further Scripture with "a steady mind," that is, with the mind of the Fathers and of Christ in our midst.

Romans

chapter/verse

1.1-2 This Gospel of Paul's calling was "promised beforehand through his prophets in the Scriptures" (.2). The New Covenant is "new" in the sense that it is always new, that is, it does not fade in that its fulfillment is not the law but the Lawgiver, completion and fulfillment, whereas the Old was promise and anticipation. St. John Chrysostom says in Romans Hom. 1 that St. Paul puts his name in every Epistle in which he was writing to people who were absent and specific, and to whom it was not obvious who would have wrote it. The Law of Moses was given directly by Moses to Israel, the Gospels by the Evangelists to the other Apostles and the people directly, etc. But most of the letters of Paul, save Hebrews, were not delivered directly by him but sent by a messenger. Therefore, they were 'signed' by him, so that they would know that they would know that they were from Him directly, and not from someone else.

1.5 The purpose of apostleship is to "bring about obedience to the faith for the sake of his name" in every nation on earth.

1.6-7 All are called to belong to Christ, and all are called to be saints.

1.9 Paul prays unceasing intercessory prayers. This is significant for in some Fathers, we read that the prayers which are intercessory are greater than the ones which plead only for the self (even though this does not take away the goodness of the ones for the self, just that the others have more good).

1.11-12 It is very significant that St. Paul, who is among the most respected Apostles of the Church, and being an Apostle among the highest ranked of the Church, reveals that it is of mutual benefit for St. Paul to "impart some spiritual gift" on the Romans, that he is encouraged as much by their faith as they are by His imparting of the gifts.

1.16-17 The Gospel itself here is called the power of God for salvation, to those of faith. And our faith is to be coupled with righteousness, that is, with good works. But let us not claim these to be our own. For though St. Paul quotes that "he who through faith is righteous shall live," and this through faith, yet he also makes it clear that this righteousness is "the righteousness of God" which is revealed through faith. Hence the synergy with God, where God lends the grace and energy and we co-use the grace with Him, even though we give glory to Him for it since He is the origin of the Grace and has the greater action in the salvation of mankind. Incidentally, this passage is one of the obvious refutations of the accusation that St. Paul preached "faith alone," for all true faith works by righteouness, which St. Paul says in another place. Incidentally, if you are wondering about "to the Jew 1st and also the Greek", St. John Chrysostom says that "first" is an honor given with regard to time only (Rom.Hom.2).

1.20 God's "invisible nature," says St. Paul, is "clearly perceived in things that have been made. What does St. Paul mean by this? "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19.1). St. John Chrysostom says that "the well-ordered things of God speak out more clearly than a trumpet," as well as what he calls the "goodly order" of time and seasons, which remain "sure and unmoved" (Rom. Hom.3). Likewise in the same homily, he tells us that it also refers to the "order," the "beauty" and the "grandueur" of all things, "preaching aloud of the Creator." But St. Chrysostom also makes it clear that it was not to leave those who are faithless without an excuse, even if this was a result: "And yet it was not for this that God has made these things, even if this came of it. For it was not to bereave them of all excuse, that He set before them so great a system of teaching, but taht they might come to know Him."

1.23 St. John Chrysostom says that the error was not the making of art or the noticing of the beauty of nature, but failing to recognize its reference back to the Creator. "To whom did they ascribe it," that is, the glory for all these great things of creation. "Not even to men, but to 'an image made like corruptible man'...and dropped down to brutes and images of them" (Rom. Hom.3). This is why traditional Orthodox Christian iconography is laconic, and especially when depicting Christ, so that there is a difference between images which "resemble mortal man" and those which represent the heavenly incorruptable man. There is that "otherness" which has been inspired from the earliest times. Not that this is requisite, for we worship the Creator, not the creature. But we do this so that no one mistakes the image for the prototype. For it is God alone who gets worshipped, and the truth of the Incarnation of God becoming man and deifying matter is ultimately declared in iconography, which uses matter which the Son deified to proclaim the Son Himself. Therefore, we do not violate these verses, but rather uphold the principle stated in 1.20, that the glory of God is perceived in the things of creation. This is what iconography is all about! It is only when you take these things and call them Gods, forgetting about the Creator, that you commit idolatry.

1.25-30 The result of idolatry is immorality. 1.26-27 of course is one of the more famous Biblical citations against homosexuality. And what is even more striking is the theological context that it is put into. For St. Paul said back in vs. 20 that the deity of God is seen in nature. This, presumably, ties into the fact that natural human relations of different sorts reflect certain aspects of the Deity of the Trinity, including marriage. Therefore, if one is giving up "natural relations," he is turning his back upon the aspects of God's glory that are revealed in nature.

2.1 Don't be a hypocrite. "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone" and "judge not, lest you yourselves be judged." Of course, St. John Chrysostom says about the judging of others that "judge not refers to matters of life, not to those of the Faith." Therefore, we do not "individually attack" anyone, for this is unChristian, but rather we only judge in matters which have to do with the upholding of basics of Faith and the unity of the Church.

2.4-5 Our hypocritical judgementalism God only forbears kindly so that this kindness might lead us to repentance, and to like kindness.

2.7 So we don't need works you say? Well this would contradict St. Paul's statement here, which says clearly that "well-doing" is necessary for "eternal life," not as a "merit-scheme," but rather as a necessary accompanyment to true Faith, which acts by love.

2.9-11 God does not show partiality, but to all who work good no matter which race of man they come from they shall have eternal life, and likewise with those steeped in sin--distress to everyone who does not do good to his neighbor regardless of lineage or background.

2.24 We see this even today, that people blaspheme the name of God and turn to atheism because they are hurt at seeing the hypocracy of the preacher or those who are in high authority.

2.28 The first statement supporting the Church as the true "Israel of God," of which the nation of Israel was only a type of Christ, whereas Christ is the fulfilled Israel, which the Church then because it is the Body of Christ, is the substance of Israel. Just as we see in the first century document of St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians, the high priesthood (episcopacy-bishopric), priesthood (presbytery), and Levitical office (diaconate) were taken away from Caiaphas. As we read in St. Hippolytus' On the Pentateuch, "God delivered the most excellent law into the hands of Moses the Prophet, the son of Amran, And Moses delivered it to Joshua...Nathan delivered it to Symeon, the elder son of Shebach. This is he who acrried the Messiah in his arms. Symeon delivered it to Jehuda. Jehuda delivered it to Zecharia the priest. And Zecharia the priest, the father of John the Baptist, delivered it to Joseph, a teacher of his own tribe. And Joseph delivered it to Hanan and Caiaphas. Moreover, from them were taken away the priestly, and kingly, and prophetic offices." They were taken away from those who were Jews by birth, and given to those who "are Jews inwardly," the true Israel, who are members of the Arch-Israelite and true Israel Himself, Jesus Christ.