

## CHAPTER SIX

*Concerning the instruction of the apostles.*

*Concerning John and Herod.*

*Concerning the five loaves and two fishes.*

*Concerning the walking on the water.*

**1-3.** And He went out from thence, and came into His own country; and His disciples follow Him. And when the sabbath day was come, He began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing Him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? And what wisdom is this which is given unto Him, that even such mighty works are wrought by His hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Judah, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us? And they were offended at Him. He goes to His home town, not unaware that they would scorn Him, but first, so that they would not later be able to say, "If He had come here, we would have believed," and secondly, so as to rebuke their envious attitude. For they ought to have boasted in the Lord as one who brought honor to their native city by His teachings and miracles; but instead they despised Him for His humble birth. Such a great evil is envy! For it always casts good things into darkness, and does not permit the envious even to see them. Even now there are many who slander those of low birth who in every other respect are worthy of honor, and in so doing their thoughts are bad and most ignoble.

**4-6.** But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. And He could there do no mighty work, save that He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And He marvelled because of their unbelief. Speaking generally, the Lord said that all prophets are without honor in their own country. For if they were of illustrious birth, they would be envied, and on this account be without honor. But if they were of low birth, they would again be without honor on account of their low birth. He could not do any mighty works there, not because of His weakness, but because of their unbelief. He does not do any mighty works there, to spare them lest it be to their greater condemnation that they do not believe even when they have witnessed

miracles. But in another sense, the working of miracles requires both the power of the one who works them and the faith of those who receive them. There in that city, because those in need of healing lacked the necessary faith, it was not possible for Jesus to work any signs. Thus, "He could do no mighty work" means "It was not possible for Him to do any mighty work."

**6-11. And He went round about the villages, teaching. And He called unto Him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them authority over unclean spirits; and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no satchel, no bread, no money in their belt: but be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats. And He said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.** The Lord taught not only in the cities but also in the villages, that we might learn not to despise the small, nor always to seek out the big cities, but to sow the word even in the humble villages. He is not the only one to teach, but He also sends out the twelve. He sends them out in pairs to embolden them. For if He sent them out singly, one of them might become fainthearted. Moreover, if He sent them out in groups of more than two, there would not have been enough apostles for all the many villages. Thus He sends them out two by two, for "Two are better than one," as Ecclesiastes says.<sup>1</sup> He commanded them to take nothing with them, neither satchel, nor money, nor bread, teaching them by this means not to love possessions, and so that those who saw these apostles, who owned nothing, would be moved, and would learn from them nonpossessiveness. Upon seeing an apostle taking neither satchel nor bread, even the basic necessities, who would not be moved, and would not also then

<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 4:9

divest himself and undertake the life of nonpossession?<sup>2</sup> He instructs them to stay in one house, lest they appear to be unstable, going from one house to the next and gourmandizing. He tells them to shake off the dust as a testimony to those who do not receive them. By this the apostles would show them that they had journeyed a long way on behalf of those ungrateful ones, who nonetheless received no benefit thereby. Or, it would show that the apostles had received nothing from them, not even the dust on their feet, but even this they shook off so that it would be a testimony and a reproof to them. "Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment" than for those who did not receive you. The men of Sodom, having been punished here in this life, will be punished even more fearfully in the next. Yet the apostles were not sent to them. Therefore, those who have rejected the apostles will suffer more harshly than the Sodomites.

**12-13. And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.** Of the four evangelists, only Mark relates that the apostles anointed with oil, but James, the brother of God,<sup>3</sup> says this as well in his general Epistle: "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the presbyters of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in addition to being a help in labors, the fuel of light, and the cause of gladness,<sup>5</sup> oil also means the mercy of God and the grace of the Holy Spirit, for thereby we are freed from labors, and

<sup>2</sup> A scholion in the Greek text adds: "Why do Matthew and Luke, when taken together, say that Jesus commanded them to have neither sandals nor staff [Mt. 10:9-10, Lk. 9:3], while Mark says that they were permitted to have only these things? What answer can be given? Jesus first commanded as Matthew and Luke related, but later He permitted them to wear sandals, and to take a staff, to protect their feet and support their bodies, condescending to their weakness because of the harshness of the journey, as this evangelist has written."

<sup>3</sup> "The brother of God" is the title given by the Church to James, the son of Joseph by his first marriage, and therefore the step-brother of Jesus. This James became the first bishop of Jerusalem, as well as the author of the Epistle of St. James.

<sup>4</sup> Jas. 5:14

<sup>5</sup> The significance of olive oil in the life of the ancient world, and in the Mediterranean world today, is perhaps difficult for others to comprehend. But even western Christians of the twentieth century may have some direct experience of oil as the fuel of light, when they fill their vigil lamps, and as the cause of gladness, when, after fasting strictly according to the ancient rules of the Church, they partake of lenten food together with 'wine and oil'.