

John Chrysostom

Last week at Shipley we were talking about the difference between the church at Jerusalem and the one at Antioch. Jerusalem was traditional and Antioch was new and emerging. We also looked at this at a previous brunch. Well just in case you thought it all went well from there on I thought we might reflect on the life of John Chrysostom who was born in Antioch in 347AD whose birth is remembered tomorrow.

Leader of the church at Antioch and spoke out against conservative forces who wanted to re-impose a Jewish version of Christianity – become Jewish first. The church had also become powerful and wealthy and was not speaking up for the ordinary people. John spoke against the extreme wealth and excesses of the empress and her court. The care for the poor and needy was a recurrent theme of his speeches and his writing.

When he first became a Christian he spent two years committing the Bible to memory. This led him to found a school at Antioch to teach others. He wrote many commentaries on books of the Bible and would often speak about the Scriptures. He rejected the popular teaching style which regarded everything as an allegory. For this reason he was loved by the ordinary people because his talks were practical explanations of the Bible applying it to everyday life. People would sit in the audience when he was speaking and copy down everything he said – just like a primitive Greenbelt. It was from this that he received his nick name Chrysostom – golden or honey mouthed.

He was saddened by the lack of knowledge of his people. He said if you asked the about their culture they would talk endlessly but if you asked them about the Bible they became mute.

He was also responsible for the creation of a version of the great liturgy of communion and wrote many prayers at least one of which remains in use today.

A Prayer of Chrysostom

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications to you; and you have promised that when two or three are gathered together in your Name you will grant their requests: fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of your servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the world to come life everlasting.

Amen.