

Cyril of Alexandria (376 – 444 AD)
Commentary on John's Gospel

John 12:27, 28 *Now is My soul troubled; and what, shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour. But for this cause [came I] unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name.*

Now, He says, is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save one from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. See I pray you in these words again how the human nature was easily affected by trouble and easily brought over to fear, whereas on the other hand the Divine and ineffable Power is in all respects inflexible and dauntless and intent on the courage which alone is befitting to It. For the mention of death which had been introduced into the discourse begins to alarm Jesus, but the Power of the Godhead straightway subdues the suffering thus excited and in a moment transforms into incomparable boldness that which had been conquered by fear. For we may suppose that even in the Saviour Jesus Christ Himself the human feelings were aroused by two qualities necessarily present in Him. For it must certainly have been under the influence of these that He shewed Himself a Man born of woman, not in deceptive appearance or mere fancy, but rather by nature and in truth, possessing every human quality, sin only excepted. And fear and alarm, although they are affections natural to us, have escaped being ranked among sins. And yet besides this, profitably were the human feelings troubled in Christ: not that the emotions should prevail and go forward, as in us; but that, having begun, they might be cut short by the power of the Word, nature in Christ first being transelemented into some better and Diviner condition. For in this way and no other was it that the process of the healing passed over 1151 even unto us. For in Christ as the firstfruits the nature of man was restored to newness of life, and in Him we have also gained things above our nature. For on this account He is also named in the Divine Scriptures a second *Adam*. And in the same manner that as Man He felt hunger and weariness, so also He feels the mental trouble that is caused by suffering, as a human characteristic. Yet He is not agitated like we are, but only just so far as to have undergone the sensation of the experience; then again immediately He returns to the courage befitting to Himself. From these things it is evident that He indeed had a rational soul. For as the circumstance of feeling hunger or indeed of experiencing any other such thing is a suffering which is peculiarly that of the flesh, so also the being agitated by the thought of terrible things must be a suffering of the rational soul, by which alone in truth a thought can enter into us through the processes of the mind. For Christ, not having yet been on the Cross actually, suffers the trouble by anticipation, evidently beholding beforehand that which was to happen, and being led by reasoning to the thought of the future events. For the suffering of dread is a feeling that we cannot ascribe to the impassible Godhead, nor yet to the Flesh; for it is an affection of the cogitations of the soul, and not of the flesh. And although an irrational animal is troubled and agitated, inasmuch as it possesses a soul, yet it does not come to feel dread by a process of thought, nor by a logical anticipation of coming suffering, but whenever it happens to find itself actually involved in any evil plight, then it painfully experiences the sensation of the danger which is present. Here, on the other hand, the Lord is troubled, not by what He sees, but by what He anticipates in thought. Further it is noteworthy that Christ did not say "*My flesh is troubled,*" but "*My soul;*" thereby dispelling the suggestion of the heretics. And although thou mayest say that in the ancient Scripture God said to the Jews: *Your fasts and holiday-keeping and festivals My soul hateth*, and other expressions of a similar 1152 kind; we shall maintain that He has made use of our habits of speech, especially by reason of His helpful condescension towards us; just as also by a forced use of language He attributes to His Incorporeal Nature a Face and Eyes and other bodily organs. But after the Incarnation, if we were to explain such expressions in the same way, it would follow that He was a mere image or phantom or shadow and not truly a Man, according to the teaching of the ungodly Manes. Therefore the Word of God made one with Himself human nature in its entirety, that so He might save the entire man. For that which has not been taken into His Nature, has not been saved.

Nevertheless, after speaking of being *troubled*, He does not relapse into silence, but transforms the suffering which had affected Him into dauntless courage, almost going so far as to say: "Death is in itself nothing; but on this account I permitted My Flesh to feel dread, that I might infuse it with a new element of courage. I came to restore life to those who are on earth, wherefore also I am prepared for My Passion."

He then makes a request of His Father and exhibits the outward appearance of prayer, not as being weak in respect of that Nature which is Almighty, but in respect of His Manhood, ascribing to the Divine Nature those attributes that are superhuman; not implying that the Divine Nature was something external to Himself, since He calls God His own Father, but in full consciousness that universal power and glory would be the lot of both Father and Son. And whether the text has: *Glorify Thy Son*, or: *Glorify Thy Name*, makes no difference in the exact significance of the ideas conveyed. Christ however, despising death and the shame of suffering, looking only to the objects to be

achieved by the suffering, and almost beholding the death of all mankind already passing out of sight as an effect of the death of His Own Flesh; knowing that the power of corruption was on the point of being for ever destroyed, and that the nature of man would be thenceforth transformed to a newness of life: He all but 1153 says something of this sort to God the Father: "The body, O Father, shrinks from encountering the suffering, and dreads that death which is unnatural to it; nay more, it seems a thing not to be endured that One Who is enthroned with Thee and Who possesses Almighty power should be grossly outraged by the audacious insults of the Jews; but since this is the cause for which I have come, *glorify Thy Son*, that is, prevent Me not from encountering death, but grant this favour to Thy Son for the good of all mankind." And that the Evangelist in some other places also speaks of the Cross under the name of "glory," thou mayest learn from what he says: *For the Holy Spirit was not yet [given]; because Jesus was not yet glorified*. For in his wisdom he in these words speaks of being "crucified" as being "*glorified*:" and the Cross is a glory. For although at the season of His Passion, Christ willingly and patiently endured many contumelies, and moreover underwent voluntarily for our sake sufferings which He might have refused to suffer; surely the undergoing this for the benefit of others is a characteristic of excessive compassion and of supreme glory. And the Son became glorious also in another way. For from the fact that He overpowered death, we recognise Him to be Life and Son of the Living God. And the Father is glorified, when He is seen to have such a Son begotten of Himself, of the same Nature as Himself. And He is Good, Light, Life, and superior to death, and One Who does whatsoever He will. And when He says: *Glorify Thy Son*, He means this: "Give Thy consent to Me in My willingness to suffer." For the Father gave up the Son to death, not without taking counsel, but in willingness for the life of the world: therefore the Father's consent is spoken, of as a bestowal of blessings upon us; for instead of "suffering" He spake of "glory." And this also He says as a Pattern for us: for while on the one hand we ought to pray that we fall not into temptation, yet on the other hand if we should be so tried we ought to bear it nobly and not to rush away from it, but to pray that we may be saved 1154 unto God. But *Glorify Thy Name*. For if through our dangers it comes to pass that God is glorified, let all things be accounted secondary to that end.

Moreover, just as death was brought to naught in no other way than by the Death of the Saviour, so also with regard to each of the sufferings of the flesh: for unless He had felt dread, human nature could not have become free from dread; unless He had experienced grief, there could never have been any deliverance from grief; unless He had been troubled and alarmed, no escape from these feelings could have been found. And with regard to every one of the affections to which human nature is liable, thou wilt find exactly the corresponding thing in Christ. The affections of His Flesh were aroused, not that they might have the upper hand as they do indeed in us, but in order that when aroused they might be thoroughly subdued by the power of the Word dwelling in the flesh, the nature of man thus undergoing a change for the better.