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The Understanding of War in St. John Chrysostom's Homily on Psalm 44

Nenad Božović

Nenad Božović

Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Belgrade
Email: nbozovic@bfspc.bg.ac.rs

Abstract

The Homily on Psalm 44 (LXX: 43) is an important source of Chrysostom's understanding of war. Although Ps 44 is attributed to David and speaks about past times, Chrysostom interprets it as a prophecy about the Maccabean revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes. This interpretation includes rare praise for the Maccabean warriors, although Chrysostom does not mention Mattathias, Judas, or any of the Hasmoneans. This is noteworthy because the Church only celebrates martyrs from the Maccabean era on the Feast of The Holy Seven Maccabee Children, Solomon Their Mother, and Eleazar Their Teacher on August 1st, and not Hasmoneans or Maccabean warriors. The aim of this paper is to illustrate Chrysostom's understanding of war, with a special emphasis on the notion of conflict as a spiritual fight. This study will examine the intertextuality between Homily on Psalm 44 and biblical texts, especially The Books of the Maccabees and Joshua. It will also compare the understanding of war in Homily on Ps 44 with other extant works, such as Homily on the Holy Maccabees and their Mother, On the Priesthood, and Homilies on Paul's Letter to the Philippians. The paper assumes that Chrysostom's understanding of war is significant for contemporary Christians and conveys a pacifist message. The main methodological framework of this study is reception history.

Keywords

Bible, Psalm, Homily, St. John Chrysostom, Maccabees, Joshua, martyrdom, war, warriors, peace, prayer, spiritual fight, God, demons

Saint John Chrysostom is revered by many Orthodox Christians. Even today, some newly built churches are dedicated to him, and some theological schools and seminaries bear his name. His legacy still echoes in the Church, and his works are read and quoted in academic papers. Although his works originated in a historical context far distant from our own, if properly understood, they are also relevant to present times.

The third decade of the 21st century brought a new war to European soil and times of uncertainty. After the horrors of the Second World War, many thought that the future would bear no such atrocities, but it seems that the quote by Mitch Albom, “The war never stops, it only pauses”¹, is more relevant than ever. Many believers turn to their tradition to understand their present historical moment. The main aim of this paper is to delve into Chrysostom’s understanding of war and to further examine his notion of conflict as a spiritual fight.

St. John Chrysostom (344/354-407), preacher in Antioch and later bishop in the see of Constantinople in the late fourth century, left a tremendous exegetical work preserved mostly in his homilies and fortunately much of it extant. The antiochene exegete left approximately six hundred sermons which according to Chrysostomus Baur sum the total of eighteen thousand scripture citations: about seven thousand of them are from the Old Testament and eleven thousand from the New. In the OT, the Psalms prevail with more than 1500 citations over Genesis (more than 900)². Chrysostom’s canon of Scripture includes canonical and deuterocanonical books alike. The manuscripts of his *Hermeneiai* on the Psalms do not include all 150, numbering only fifty-eight psalms in blocks from 4-13, 44-50, 109-118, 120-150³. Most of Chrysostom’s exegetical homilies, including these, are delivered during the years of his Antiochene ministry (386-398), before his fateful move to Constantinople⁴. The precise

¹ Mitch ALBOM, *Have a Little Faith - A True Story*, Hyperion e-book, 2011.

² Chrysostomus BAUR, *John Chrysostom and his Time*, vol. I – *Antioch*, transl. M. Gonzaga, Newman Press, Westminster, MD, 1959, p. 316.

³ Robert Charles HILL, “Introduction” to ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1, transl. Robert Charles Hill, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, MA, 1998, p. 3.

⁴ Charles KANNENGISSER, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis - The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, Brill, Leiden, 2006, pp. 783-784.

date of delivery of these sermons is uncertain, the evidence from the text is inconclusive⁵.

I. Introduction to Ps 44⁶

Psalm 44 begins with the words, “We have heard with our ears, O God; our ancestors have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago”. Some authors classify the psalm as a lamentation of the people (*Volksklagelied*), and since it describes past events (salvation history), present disasters, and a petition for their future cessation, the psalm could also be seen as a mixture of genres⁷.

The glorious traditions of God’s salvation acts in history were a sacred heritage for every Israelite. The first verse of the psalm can be paralleled with Ex 10, 2 and 12, 27, where God commands Moses to retell all the miraculous acts to future generations (also Deut 6, 10). The second verse reminds us of the Conquest of Canaan: “With your hand, you drove out the nations and planted our ancestors”, and verses 3-8 state that victory lies not in Israel’s military capacities, but in God’s force, which gives victory. However, in verse 9, the Israelites are convinced that God is no longer with their army, and from verses 10-16, they depict his rejection through the defeats and plunder of their adversaries, using picturesque terms such as “devoured like sheep” and “scattered among the nations”. Normally, the typical biblical reason for such national disasters would be idolatry and corruption, but verses 17-22 say that they did not forget the name of their God and did not stray from his path. They feel abandoned and wonder why God has allowed them to suffer so greatly, even though they have remained faithful to him. Despite their despair, the Israelites continue to trust in God and plead for his help. The final verses (23-26) end with a prayer for God

⁵ R. C. HILL, “Introduction”, p. 4.

⁶ Although Chrysostom uses the numeration of the Psalm as 43 according to the LXX, we are going to keep the number 44 as given in the Masoretic text since most of the English translations render that numeration.

⁷ Dieter BÖHLER, *Psalmen 1-50*, coll. *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament*, edited by Ulrich BERGES et. al., Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau, 2021, p. 801.

to wake up, come to their aid, and deliver them from their troubles.

The sad scenes of Israel's defeat and scattering among the nations could point to a date after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC because such events did not occur previously. However, verse 9 points out that there is still a standing army, and moreover, verses 17-18 insist that the plight was not due to national sin. That means it could not fit the time of the Babylonian captivity but only the time of the Maccabees since their armies were attacked precisely for their zealous observance of Torah⁸. That is why Chrysostom, right after the rendering of the first quote of the psalm, begins his sermon with the following:

“While it is the inspired author who recites this psalm, he recites it not in his own person but in the person of the Maccabees, describing and foretelling what would happen at that time. The inspired authors are like that, you see: they span all times, the past, the present, the future”⁹.

This means that Chrysostom holds the conservative view of the psalm authorship – the author is without doubt David describing the future events he saw in a prophetic vision. The exegete is not alone in this regard. He is sharing this view with his fellow Antiochians. Diodor of Tarsus says, “Blessed David presents the psalm as though coming from the Maccabees”¹⁰ and Theodoret of Cyrus, states that the text “predicts the Macedonian savagery”¹¹.

II. Chrysostom's understanding of war as spiritual fight

In the next few passages of the sermon, Chrysostom proceeds to give a summary of the opening chapters of the first book of Maccabees. In those

⁸ The opinions of the commentators in regard of the date of Ps 43 vary, but the majority of them plead for the time of the Maccabees. However, some say the psalm deals with a “fundamental problem” which cannot be limited to a specific era. BÖHLER, *Psalmen*, p. 801.

⁹ ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Commentary on the Psalms* 44, 1, p. 231.

¹⁰ DIODOR, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 44, 1, coll. *Writings from the Greco-Roman World* (abbrv. WGRW) 9, p. 138.

¹¹ THEODORET, *Commentary on the Psalms* 44, 1, coll. *Fathers of the Church* (abbrv. FC) 101, p. 254.

paragraphs, we find rare praise for the Maccabean warriors, and the whole sermon reflects his notion of war and conflict. When Antiochus Epiphanes attacked the Jews, he forced many of the people to betray their ancestral way of life, but the Maccabees held firm and were in no way led astray by these trials. At the outbreak of war, they went into hiding, gathered their strength, and summoned all the people who previously “lost heart”, persuading them to return to the ancestral Law. Chrysostom focuses on the motifs for going to war:

“They were fighting, in fact, not so much for women and children and households, not over the subjection and enslavement of their country, but for the Law and the ancestral way of life; their general was God. Accordingly, they took up battle formation and put themselves into the line, and routed their adversaries. Their trust was not in weapons; instead, in place of all military equipment they had sufficient cause to fight for. So they went into battle without putting on a show or raising battle cries, as some do, and without enrolling flute players, as happens in some armies; instead, they called on God to come from on high and assist them by stretching forth his hand, since it was for his sake they were fighting and for his glory they entered the lists”¹².

The Antiochian preacher finds the righteous motif a sufficient cause for glorious victory. According to him, the Maccabees are not fighting for any earthly thing (women, children, and households), not even in defense of their own homeland, but only for the Law and ancestral way of life. That is why their armies are not like any known; they do not put battle cries or hire musicians. The structure of this army is different: on the top commanding place is God as the general, the armies go into battle formation fortified with spiritual help. Since the Maccabees are fighting for God’s sake, he calls them an “army of God”.

The sermon continues with an emphasis on the power of prayer in times of war. Some of the Israeli fighters saw the size and array of the Antiochus

¹² ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Commentary on the Psalms 44*, 1, p. 232.

forces and considered themselves weak and numerically inferior, so they became cowardly and timid. This is where the words of the psalm come to help: by remembering former salvation acts of God, it shows them that victory is possible even without an army if he lends assistance. The words of the psalms function as encouragement, giving them greater spirit, and Chrysostom says it is not a small thing. The psalmist would not have the same effect if he directed his prophecy to the doubtful soldiers, so he addresses the words to God in the form of prayer. This all leads to the notion stated in vs. 3 that it was not the sword that gave them victory, but the right hand of God. The passage concludes: “So all his prayer is an exhortation to the soldiers, bidding them to commit everything to God, and leave the victory to depend on hope from that quarter”¹³.

The motif of God’s victory over heathens is used abundantly in the homily, and Chrysostom emphasizes it by making an intertextual connection with the Book of Joshua. The glorious deeds of God mentioned in verse 3 and retold through the generations are the ones mentioned in the Conquest of Canaan. The Israelites encircled Jericho bearing arms not for battle but for appearance’s sake, and they were wearing sacred robes, marching after Levites who carried the Ark of the Covenant: “... they had no need of weapons; instead, they captured cities by mere shout and crossing the Jordan they overran the first city that stood in their way, Jericho as though by dancing rather than fighting”¹⁴.

The swords they carried were useless against the fortress of Jericho, yet the walls crumbled because of God’s will. All of that happened so that they might be brought to faith. Chrysostom concludes the passage with a reference that *the war was not against human beings* since arms had no effect¹⁵. Although he does not state it explicitly, it seems that in this sermon, the war is waged against the devil¹⁶.

¹³ “In truth, all those fully armed prevailed in the wars; they prevailed, yet it was not the result of their arms but of God their leader. Do you see how under the guise of a prayer he reveals his strategy, exhorting them to place all their hope in God? [...] And so the events were due to goodwill, not to righteous deeds, nor did their success arise from their own virtue but from God’s lovingkindness”. ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Commentary on the Psalms* 44:3, pp. 241-242.

¹⁴ ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Commentary on the Psalms* 44, 2, p. 237.

¹⁵ ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Commentary on the Psalms* 44, 2, p. 238.

¹⁶ ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Commentary on the Psalms* 44, 2, p. 243.

As we can clearly see in previous passages, Chrysostom understands war as a spiritual fight. St. John did not praise war as a phenomenon *per se*, and when he mentions the conflict itself, it is described vaguely and completely diminished. It is not just a historical conflict between Antioch and the Maccabees; it is a war between good and evil, between God and the devil. This notion is supported by other biblical references, such as Joshua, where the fight is conceived as a battle between God and Canaan, i.e., between true faith and paganism. The use of arms, battle tactics, and formation are evaluated as second-rate. The physical component of fighting, waving swords and spilling blood, is completely neglected. The true war that was fought “behind the historical scene” is a spiritual one, and the proponents of conflict are only representatives of far greater forces. The victory of the Maccabees against Antioch is a consequence of righteousness and pure zeal for the Torah (God’s Law). They had righteous motives far beyond any earthly thing. The shepherd of the Antiochian flock emphasizes the power of prayer before the battle and the fact that the fighters are fully conscious that victory is given by God, even when faced with a highly powerful enemy. The victory in war is an act of God’s charisma, and vice versa, defeat is a consequence of sin.

III. Chrysostom’s Sermon on the Maccabean Martyrs and Its Connection to Homily on Ps 44

It is noticeable that neither Mattathias nor his son Judah Maccabee or any of the Hasmoneans were mentioned throughout Chrysostom’s sermon on Ps 44. Although St. John uses the narrative of 2 Maccabees in explaining Ps 44, and even though the Maccabean martyrs and Maccabean warriors are together in the same book, it seems that the reception of both stories goes separate ways, not just in the case of St. John, but also in the works of other Church fathers.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus, in his *Oration 15 (In Praise of the Maccabees)*, praises only the Maccabean martyrs and not the Maccabean warriors¹⁷. Diodor of Tarsus doesn’t mention them in his commentary on

¹⁷ This is the first oration in praise of the Maccabees delivered in December 362 in Nazianzus. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *Oration 15*, FC 107, pp. 72-84.

Psalms¹⁸, but Theodoret briefly mentions Mattathias along with his sons¹⁹. This is in compliance with the experience of the Orthodox Church, which on August 1/14 celebrates only the martyrs from the Maccabean time called the Feast of the Holy Seven Maccabee Children, Solomone Their Mother, and Eleazar Their Teacher. The Feast is based on the events described in 2 Maccabees 6-7, although these martyrs pre-date Christ. The Orthodox Church does not celebrate Mattathias, Judas, or any of the Hasmoneans as saints, although they are mentioned in many works of the holy fathers as good examples of virtue and pious zeal.

There could be many reasons for such a development. The first reason for this could be the experience of persecution in the first centuries of the Christian era and the fact that the martyrs are following the example of Christ's non-violent attitude as opposed to armed rebellion (no matter how righteous the motives are, even in a situation of defensive war). The reserved attitude towards war and violence echoes through the writings of the early church fathers. Chrysostom, likewise, is careful regarding the just war theory, because Christians are not permitted to forcibly correct those who sin, and wrongdoers must be made better, not by force, but by persuasion. He is more inclined to the message of pacifism as early Christian martyrs²⁰.

¹⁸ DIODOR, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 44, 1, WGRW 9, p. 138.

¹⁹ Theodoret of Cyrus on Mattathias and his sons: "With a few troops he took to the field against them and won, removed the altars of the idols, purified the divine temple, and restored the customary worship to his countrymen. Now, it was not only he but also his sons after his death who put the enemy to flight by prayer, and who by enjoying divine aid erected trophies". THEODORET, *Commentary on the Psalms* 44, 1, FC 101, p. 254. Further in his commentary on the psalm he lists Mattathias together with the seven young men, their mother and Eleazar the priest because they gave evidence of the virtue: "they were not subdued by the torments nor bowed by the punishments; instead, they kept their reverence". THEODORET, *Commentary on the Psalms* 44, 8, FC 101, p. 254. However, Mattathias slaughtered the king's emissary who tried to persuade him not to observe the Torah, as well as the fellow Jew who submitted to the king's demands (1 Maccabees 2, 24-25). This is in contrast to the Holy Maccabees, who were slaughtered by the king's executors (2 Maccabees 6-7).

²⁰ David K. GOODIN, "Just-War Theory and Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Theological Perspective on the Doctrinal Legacy of Chrysostom and Constantine-Cyril", *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 48:3-4, 2004, pp. 259-263.

The restraint of the above-named church fathers in mentioning Mattathias and his sons could also have a concrete historical background in a religious competition between the Church and the Synagogue in Antiochia²¹. Namely, many Christians took part in celebrating Jewish holidays like Hanukkah and Rosh Hashanah, and Judaizing tendencies threatened the identity of the Church. These tendencies were not limited only to religious practice but pervaded many areas of life. The series of eight Sunday sermons delivered by St. John in late summer and autumn of 386 or 387 A.C, now also known as the *Adversus Judaeos* or *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, addresses exactly this problem. We can't be certain about the date of origin of Chrysostom's Homilies on the Psalms (some say before the ordination in 386, and others claim the period after ordination up until the movement to Constantinople in 398), but it is certain that the historical and cultural context of *Discourses against Judaizing Christians* and *Homilies on the Psalms* is one and the same.

However, the restraint regarding Maccabean warriors did not extend to the Maccabean martyrs. This development could be connected to the fact that there was a firm tradition of a local tomb for the Maccabean brothers, according to sources from the mid-fourth century. The tomb was firstly a place of Jewish veneration, perhaps even a synagogue atop the tomb, with the intensive veneration of the Antiochian Christians. Later, the site was appropriated by the Church of Antioch and transformed into a basilica around 400 A.D.²² and in the later fourth century, it spread over the Roman Empire²³.

St. John preached about the Maccabean martyrs in three sermons altogether. The notion of war as a spiritual fight is similar to the one presented in the Homily on Ps 44. It is, therefore, significant to make

²¹ Johannes HAHN, "The Veneration of the Maccabean Brothers in Fourth Century Antioch: Religious Competition, Martyrdom, and Innovation", in: Gabriela SIGNORI (ed.), *Dying for the Faith, Killing for the Faith - Old-Testament Faith-Warriors (1 and 2 Maccabees) in Historical Perspective*, coll. *Brill's Studies in Intellectual History*, vol. 206, Brill, Leiden, 2012, p. 89.

²² J. HAHN, "The Veneration...", p. 82.

²³ Albrecht BERGER, "The Cult of the Maccabees in the Eastern Orthodox Church", in: Gabriela SIGNORI (ed.) *Dying for the Faith, Killing for the Faith - Old-Testament Faith-Warriors (1 and 2 Maccabees) in Historical Perspective*, pp. 105-123.

a comparison. As described in 2 Maccabees 6-7, elder Eleazar is killed because he did not want to eat pork, and Mother Solomone with her seven children died in Antiochia by the hand of a pagan emperor in gruesome ways for the same reason. Reflecting on the events described in the book, St. John says:

“For it is not the wrestling of humans versus humans, but the fighting of humans versus demons. And so, when he set up this kind of contest for us, he didn’t escort into the wrestling matches young and vigorous athletes, but quite immature youths and with them an old man, meant, and in addition to them an elderly woman, the youth’s mother. [...] Who ever heard of a woman competing at such an advanced age? [...] So, whenever you see a woman, who is shaky, elderly, who requires a walking/stick, entering a contest and destroying a tyrant’s rage, defeating incorporeal powers, conquering the Devil with ease, smashing his strength with considerable force, marvel at the president of the games grace, be astonished at Christ’s power. The athletes are not vigorous in the flesh, but they are vigorous in their faith. Their constitution is weak but the grace that sustains them is powerful”²⁴.

As in the previous case, we can clearly see the disproportion of opposing sides: fierce Macedonian forces against a group of Maccabee rebels, the old Eleazar and a mother with seven children against the tyrant. Despite the disproportion, the smaller and underrated party prevailed. The victory should be seen through spiritual lenses: the fight is not between humans, but between humans and demons. St. John clearly sides with the oppressed and sees the aggressor as the devil’s puppet.

²⁴ ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, “Homily on the Holy Maccabees and their Mother” 2-3, in: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *The Cult of the Saints*, transl. Wendy Mayer and Bronwen Niel, coll. *Popular Patristics Series* (abbrv. PPS) 31, SVS Press, 2006, pp. 135-153.

IV. Chrysostom's notion of war in Homily on Ps 44 in comparison with other works

Although St. John did not write extensively on the topic of war, he did address it not only in Homily on Ps 44 and in sermons about Maccabean martyrs, but also in his other works. Chrysostom praises the generals who think strategically and try to preserve the life of the combatants. However, their victory comes as a consequence of those who have fallen in battle, but he says that their spirits were victorious and their defeat was only a bodily one²⁵.

In the work *On the Priesthood*, the notion of war as a spiritual fight is evident. The shepherd of the flock has a more terrifying responsibility to the congregation faced daily by the priest against the attacks of Satan than the commander in the horrors of warfare. He supports his view with the quote from Eph 6, 12 that our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers of darkness²⁶.

There is also a very important passage about war in his *Homily 15 on Paul's Letter to Philippians*, which emphasizes the pacifist message and concentrates on individual responsibility in war prevention:

“You see, if we're going to be at peace with each other, God too will be with us, whereas if we're going to wage war, God's peace will not be with us. [...] He's not a god of war and battle. Leave both the war and the battle, both the battle against him and the one against our neighbor. Be peaceful toward everyone. [...] ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called sons of God’ [Matt 5, 9]. Such people continually imitate the Son of God - you too must imitate him. Make your peace. The more your brother wars against you, the greater your gain. For

²⁵ ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *On the Priesthood* 1.8, NPNF 9: 39.

²⁶ “Do you see the terrible multitude of enemies, and their fierce squadrons, not steel clad, but endued with a nature which is of itself an equivalent for a complete suit of armor. Would you see yet another host, stern and cruel, beleaguering this flock? This also you shall behold from the same post of observation”. ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *On the Priesthood* 2.2, NPNF 9: 40.

listen to the prophet when he says, ‘I was peaceful with those who hate peace’ [Ps 119, 6]”²⁷.

Chrysostom continues this sermon by exposing war and conflict as a consequence of greed and envy, and he connects their roots with the failed spiritual struggle of every individual. Making peace brings us closer to God and releases us from sin, but if we fight, we are a long way from God. As in Homily on Ps 44, war is again understood primarily as a spiritual fight because it precedes every other type of conflict. This time it is more closely connected to the responsibility and actions of every human being, Christians in particular.

V. Conclusion

According to St. John, Psalm 44 is a Davidic psalm that depicts a prophetic vision of the Maccabean uprising against Antiochus Epiphanes. Based on what is mentioned in chapter one, we can conclude that the Maccabean war was justified, but only because they fought neither for glory nor wealth, nor even to defend their homeland, but only to preserve the ancestral way of life and the observance of the Torah. Their motive for fighting was noble and pure. In that kind of war, Chrysostom clearly sides with the oppressed, but we can assume that he justifies war only under those circumstances.

Nevertheless, the Antiochian preacher sees this war and its violence through spiritual lenses. The true war that was fought is “behind the historical scene”, and it’s a spiritual one. The proponents of conflict are only representatives of far greater forces; it is a war between God and the devil. Antioch and the Maccabees, in Chrysostom’s view, are like pawns in this cosmic battle from the beginning of time between good and evil, and he assures us that the good inevitably prevails. The Maccabean victory in this war is thus not a result of their skill or war strategy; it was a gift of God who fought that fight for them. Maccabean warriors are, from his perspective, fully aware that their success was not the consequence of their

²⁷ ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* 15, WRGW 36, pp. 291-293.

weapons and bravery, but of God's salvation act, like the ones mentioned in Joshua. In this kind of war, the one who prevails is the one who has a powerful prayer before the battle, firm faith in God, and a pure heart.

This is the reason why St. John refrains from describing the war in its phenomenological form. In other words, he does not praise the clashing of swords, physical violence, war cry, blood, and tears. The corporeal aspect of war is completely diminished. That is maybe best described in his intertextual reference to Joshua 6, where he states that Jericho was conquered "as though by dancing rather than fighting".

In this line of thought, the restraint in mentioning Mattathias, Judah Maccabee, or any Hasmonean in the Homily on Ps 44 is understandable. Maccabean warriors are not celebrated as saints in the Orthodox Church, unlike the Holy Maccabean martyrs. His words that "God is not the God of war and battle" succinctly sum it up. The martyrs are following the example of Christ's non-violent attitude as opposed to a violent response to oppression. Therefore, based on Chrysostom's judgment in the *Homily on the Holy Maccabees and their Mother*, they are the supreme victors in this spiritual battle: their wounds are Christ's wounds, and demons flee from them. Although their bodies have fallen, their spirit is victorious.

The notion of war as a spiritual fight has a strong connection with other Chrysostom sermons, such as *On the Priesthood* and *Homily on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. The first one provides us with the root of Chrysostom's notion of war, which can be found in the words of Apostle Paul: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil" (Eph 6, 12). The second homily emphasizes the pacifist message and concentrates on an individual responsibility in war prevention.

This leads us to the reflection of the significance of Chrysostom's understanding of war nowadays. St. John's method of Scripture interpretation always implies an immediate, practical application of its message. The interpretation of Ps 44 was a good guide for those committed to his care, but it also fits the conditions of the present time and problems of daily life. Ps 44 could also be understood as a metaphorical representation of the Christian struggle against sin and evil. In his point of view, the enemies

mentioned in the psalm could be representing dark forces, and the victory of the Israelites as representing the triumph of Christ over sin and death. The Christian life is a constant battle against the forces of evil. Antiochian shepherd encourages us to take up the spiritual weapons: prayer, fasting, repentance, and almsgiving in this fight.

Based on his judgment in the Homily on Philippians, Chrysostom is inviting us to dive deep into ourselves and examine our souls to see if we somehow contribute to war and conflict and to what extent to peace. As he sees it, the root of every conflict is the defeat in the spiritual battle, which lies in our greed, envy, and hate. If we still tend to have all of these in our hearts, we are far away from God, although we do not take part in actual physical conflict. Also, if we, in any way, deepen the conflict for our own interests or if we ignore it and do nothing to contribute to making peace by appealing to both opposing sides, we are failing in this spiritual battle. The life of a Christian is a permanent struggle towards change, and it demands personal sacrifice. These are essential for victory in both the spiritual and physical realms.