

ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON THE FIVE PATHS OF REPENTANCE

Shall I list the paths of repentance? There are certainly many of them, many and various, and all of them lead to heaven.

The first path is the path of condemnation of sins. As Isaiah says, Tell your sins, and you will be acquitted. And the Psalmist adds: I said “I will bear witness against myself before the Lord,” and you forgave the guilt of my sin. So you, too must condemn the sins you have committed. Condemn them, and that condemnation will excuse you in front of the Lord, since whoever condemns the sins he has committed will be slower to commit them next time. Stir up your own conscience to be your accuser – so that when you come before the judgement-seat of the Lord no-one will rise up to accuse you.

This is the first path of repentance but the second is in no way inferior to it in excellence. It is to forget the harm done to us by our enemies, to master our anger, to forgive the sins of those who are slaves together with us. As much as we do this, so much will our own sins against the Lord be forgiven. So this is the second path to the expiation of our sins. As the Lord says, Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours.

Would you like to know the third path of repentance? It is prayer: fervent prayer, sincere and focused prayer, prayer coming from the depths of the heart.

If you want to know the fourth path, I will tell you it is the giving of alms. It has great power.

And finally, if someone acts with modesty and humility, that path is no less effective as a way to deprive sin of its substance. Look at the publican, who had no good deeds to speak of. In place of good deeds he offered humility, and the huge burden of his sins fell away.

So now I have shown you the five paths of repentance. First, condemnation of sins. Second, forgiving the sins of those near us. Third, prayer. Fourth, almsgiving. Fifth, humility.

So do not be idle, but every day advance along all these paths at once. They are not hard paths to follow. Poverty is no excuse for not setting out on the journey. Even if you are destitute you can do all these things: put aside anger, carry humility in front of you, pray hard, condemn your sins. Poverty is no obstacle – not even to that path of penitence that demands money: that is, almsgiving. Remember the story of the widow's mite.

Now we have learnt the right way to heal our wounds, let us apply these remedies. Let us regain true health and confidently receive the blessings of Holy Communion. Thus we may come, filled with glory, to the glory of Christ's kingdom, and receive its eternal joys through the grace, mercy and kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ.