

'Soft Light'
(Anthol. Rus. Rel. Russ 22)

Last year, the head of the Coptic church, in Egypt, Pope Shenouda III was exiled to a desert monastery by the then president Sadat, and a committee of 5 bishops appointed to head the church in his place. The reason for these moves was evidently to silence Pope Shenouda and undermine his authority among his people. He's still in that exile, and he's still a force to be reckoned with in the mixed state and religious politics of Egypt, tho' Sadat is gone and (it seems) not much mourned in Egypt at least. The political & religious problems that Pope Shenouda was trying to deal with remain: and there are problems within the Coptic church, made more difficult by what has been happening. That's just one story of how state and church clash - there are many many others today, all around the world; and it isn't always exile that's the fate of Christians accused of "interfering" in politics. What's called "interference" is very often a matter of preaching and speaking about injustice of one kind or another in society, and of defending and speaking up for the poor, the voiceless and the dispossessed. That, in effect, was what Shenouda was doing in the context of Egyptian society & politics under Sadat. Many hundreds of years ago, there was a rather strikingly similar case, also in the Middle East - concerning a man who, because of his eloquence, got himself the nick-name "Golden Mouth": he's more commonly known as John Chrysostom, and today's his feast-day. He too was sent into exile (twice in fact), from Constantinople where he was the archbishop, and he died in exile, at least partially as a result of a long forced journey through part of Armenia around the Black Sea. Before he left

for his exile, he talked about it in a sermon - and that's what I'll quote from for you towards the end of the programme today. Although there had been some intrigue by the imperial court to get Chrysostom as the new archbishop of Constantinople, it wasn't long before the intriguers began to regret their choice, especially the emperor who thought that she was the target of a lot of Chrysostom's criticism: and it was eventually her doing that got him removed. The kinds of thing that he talked plainly and bluntly about are surprisingly like what's being said today by some church people who are sometimes thought of as very radical. He complained about the poor being neglected, about luxury spending by the court and officials and government officers: he attacked the craze for going to the races, even on Sundays & days like Good Friday; gambling too was a target of his - and too much food, drink, loose morals both in the state and the church. Chrysostom took his cues from the scriptures, applying them in very practical & down-to-earth ways to current social problems and current affairs - much of what he preached is by no means out-of-date for a place & time like our own. Today then, let us remember him & give thanks to God for the guidance & inspiration he gave to his church in his day: and pray for all pastors that they may lead their people with the same kind of courageous conviction and persuasive eloquence & wisdom that gave John his name, Chrysostom. Before listening to his words, though, a piece of music from the Russian orthodox liturgy: MUSIC "God Is With Us"

Anthologie de la
Musique Rel. Russ
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PRAYERS

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