

# The Cross of Christ, the Cosmic Tree

## Detail from the Apse Mosaic at San Clemente, Rome

by Pseudo-Chrysostom (5th century)



**This Tree is my eternal salvation.** It is my nourishment and my banquet. Amid its roots I cast my own roots deep: beneath its boughs I grow and expand, revelling in its sigh as in the wind itself. Flying from the burning heat, I have pitched my tent in its shadow, and have found a resting-place of dewy freshness. I flower with its flowers; its fruits bring perfect joy - fruits which have been preserved for me since time's beginning, and which now I freely eat.

**This Tree** is a food, sweet food, for my hunger, and a fountain for my thirst; it is clothing for my nakedness; its leaves are the breath of life. Away with the fig-tree, from this time on! If I fear God, this is my protection; if I stumble, this is my support; it is the prize for which I fight and the reward of my victory. This is my straitened path, my narrow way; this is the stairway of Jacob, where angels pass up and down, and where the Lord in very truth standing at the head.

**This Tree**, vast as heaven itself, rises from earth to the skies, a plant immortal, set firm in the midst of heaven and earth, base of all that is, foundation of the universe, support of this world of men and women, binding-force of all creation, holding within itself all the mysterious essence of man and woman. Secured with the unseen clamps of the spirit, so that, adjusted to the Divine, it may never bend or warp, with foot resting firm on earth it towers to the topmost skies, and spans with its all-embracing arms the boundless gulf of space between.

He was All, and in all, filling it with himself; stripped naked for battle against the powers of the air. . .

With him two thieves were extended, bearing within themselves the marks of those two peoples, the marks of those two types of mind. . .

When this cosmic combat came to an end ... the heavens shook; almost, the stars fell from the skies; the light of the sun was extinguished for a time; rocks were split asunder; the entire world was all but shattered... But great Jesus breathed forth his divine Soul, saying: "Father, into Thy hand I commend my spirit." And lo, even while all things shuddered and heaved in earthquake, reeling for fear, his divine Soul ascended, giving life and strength to all; and again creation was still, as if this divine Crucifixion and Extension had everywhere unfolded and spread, penetrating all things, through all, and in all.

O, Thou who art alone among the alone, and all in all! Let the heavens hold thy Godhead; and paradise, thy soul; and earth, thy blood ... For the Indivisible has become divided, so that all might be saved, and that the world below might not remain ignorant of the coming of God...

We beseech thee now, Lord God, Christ, eternal King of souls: stretch forth thy mighty hands over thy sacred Church and over a holy people for ever thine.

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*from a homily of John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople [407]*  
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