

# **Commentary on the Song of Songs**

## **By Saint Bernard of Clairvaux**

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## **SERMON 1 ON THE TITLE OF THE BOOK**

The instructions that I address to you, my brothers, will differ from those I should deliver to people in the world, at least the manner will be different. The preacher who desires to follow St Paul's method of teaching will give them milk to drink rather than solid food, and will serve a more nourishing diet to those who are spiritually enlightened: "We teach," he said, "not in the way philosophy is taught, but in the way that the Spirit teaches us: we teach spiritual things spiritually." And again: "We have a wisdom to offer those who have reached maturity," in whose company, I feel assured, you are to be found, unless in vain have you prolonged your study of divine teaching, mortified your senses, and meditated day and night on God's law. Be ready then to feed on bread rather than milk. Solomon has bread to give that is splendid and delicious, the bread of that book called "The Song of Songs." Let us bring it forth then if you please, and break it.

2. Now, unless I am mistaken, by the grace of God you have understood quite well from the book of Ecclesiastes how to recognize and have done with the false promise of this world. And then the book of Proverbs - has not your life and your conduct been sufficiently amended and enlightened by the doctrine it inculcates ? These are two loaves of which it has been your pleasure to taste, loaves you have welcomed as coming from the cupboard of a friend. Now approach for this third loaf that, if possible, you may always recognize what is best. Since there are two evils that comprise the only, or at least the main, enemies of the soul: a misguided love of the world and an excessive love of self, the two books previously mentioned can provide an antidote to each of these infections. One uproots pernicious habits of mind and body with the hoe of self-control. The

other, by the use of enlightened reason, quickly perceives a delusive tinge in all that the world holds glorious, truly distinguishing between it and deeper truth. Moreover, it causes the fear of God and the observance of his commandments to be preferred to all human pursuits and worldly desires. And rightly so, for the former is the beginning of wisdom, the latter its culmination, for there is no true and consummate wisdom other than the avoidance of evil and the doing of good, no one can successfully shun evil without the fear of God, and no work is good without the observance of the commandments.

3. Taking it then these two evils have been warded off by the reading of choice books, we may suitably proceed with this holy and contemplative discourse which, as the fruit of the other two, may be delivered only to well prepared ears and minds.

Before the flesh has been tamed and the spirit set free by zeal for truth, before the world's glamour and entanglements have been firmly repudiated, it is a rash enterprise on any man's part to presume to study spiritual doctrines. Just as a light is flashed in vain on closed or sightless eyes, so "an unspiritual person cannot accept anything of the Spirit of God." For "the Holy Spirit of instruction shuns what is false," and that is what the life of the intemperate man is. Nor will he ever have a part with the pretensions of the world, since he is the Spirit of Truth. How can there be harmony between the wisdom that comes down from above and the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness to God, or the wisdom of the flesh which is at enmity with God? I am sure that the friend who comes to us on his travels will have no reason to murmur against us after he has shared in this third loaf.

4. But who is going to divide this loaf? The Master of the house is present, it is the Lord you must see in the breaking of the bread. For who else could more fittingly do it? It is a task that I would not dare to arrogate to myself. So look upon me as one from whom you look for nothing. For I myself am one of the seekers, one who begs along with you for the food of my soul, the nourishment of my spirit. Poor and needy, I knock at that door of his which, "when he opens, nobody can close," that I may find light on the profound mystery to which this discourse leads. Patiently all creatures look to you, O Lord. "Little children go begging for bread; no one spares a scrap for them;" they await it from your merciful love. O God most kind, break your bread for this hungering flock, through my hands indeed if it should please you, but with an efficacy that is all

your own.

5. Tell us, I beg you, by whom, about whom and to whom it is said: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." How shall I explain so abrupt a beginning, this sudden irruption as from a speech in mid-course? For the words spring upon us as if indicating one speaker to whom another is replying as she demands a kiss — whoever she may be. But if she asks for or demands a kiss from somebody, why does she distinctly and expressly say with the mouth, and even with his own mouth, as if lovers should kiss by means other than the mouth, or with mouths other than their own? But yet she does not say: "Let him kiss me with his mouth"; what she says is still more intimate: "with the kiss of his mouth." How delightful a ploy of speech this, prompted into life by the kiss, with Scripture's own engaging countenance inspiring the reader and enticing him on, that he may find pleasure even in the laborious pursuit of what lies hidden, with a fascinating theme to sweeten the fatigue of research. Surely this mode of beginning that is not a beginning, this novelty of diction in a book so old, cannot but increase the reader's attention. It must follow too that this work was composed, not by any human skill but by the artistry of the Spirit, difficult to understand indeed but yet enticing one to investigate.

6. So now what shall we do? Shall we by-pass the title? No, not even one iota may be omitted, since we are commanded to gather up the tiniest fragments lest they be lost. The title runs: "The beginning of Solomon's Song of Songs." First of all take note of the appropriateness of the name "Peaceful," that is, Solomon, at the head of a book which opens with the token of peace, with a kiss. Take note too that by this kind of opening only men of peaceful minds, men who can achieve mastery over the turmoil of the passions and the distracting burden of daily chores, are invited to the study of this book.

7. Again, the title is not simply the word "Song," but "Song of Songs," a detail not without significance. For though I have read many songs in the Scriptures, I cannot recall any that bear such a name. Israel chanted a song to Yahweh celebrating his escape from the sword and the tyranny of Pharaoh, and the twofold good fortune that simultaneously liberated and avenged him in the Red Sea. Yet even though chanted, this has not been called a "Song of Songs"; Scripture, if my memory serves me right, introduces it with the words: "Israel sang this song in honor of Yahweh." Song poured from the lips of Deborah, of Judith, of the mother of Samuel, of several of the prophets, yet none of these

songs is styled a "Song of Songs." You will find that all of them, as far as I can see, were inspired to song because of favors to themselves or to their people, songs for a victory won, for an escape from danger or the gaining of a boon long sought. They would not be found ungrateful for the divine beneficence, so all sang for reasons proper to each, in accord with the Psalmist's words: "He gives thanks to you, O God, for blessing him." But King Solomon himself, unique as he was in wisdom, renowned above all men, abounding in wealth, secure in his peace, stood in no need of any particular benefit that would have inspired him to sing those songs. Nor does Scripture in any place attribute such a motive to him.

8. We must conclude then it was a special divine impulse that inspired these songs of his that now celebrate the praises of Christ and his Church, the gift of holy love, the sacrament of endless union with God. Here too are expressed the mounting desires of the soul, its marriage song, an exultation of spirit poured forth in figurative language pregnant with delight. It is no wonder that like Moses he put a veil on his face, equally resplendent as it must have been in this encounter, because in those days few if any could sustain the bright vision of God's glory. Accordingly, because of its excellence, I consider this nuptial song to be well deserving of the title that so remarkably designates it, the Song of Songs, just as he in whose honor it is sung is uniquely proclaimed King of kings and Lord of lords.

9. Furthermore if you look back on your own experience, is it not in that victory by which your faith overcomes the world, in "your exit from the horrible pit and out of the slough of the marsh," that you yourselves sing a new song to the Lord for all the marvels he has performed? Again, when he purposed to "settle your feet on a rock and to direct your steps," then too, I feel certain, a new song was sounding on your lips, a song to our God for his gracious renewal of your life. When you repented he not only forgave your sins but even promised rewards, so that rejoicing in the hope of benefits to come, you sing of the Lord's ways: how great is the glory of the Lord! And when, as happens, texts of Scripture hitherto dark and impenetrable at last become bright with meaning for you, then, in gratitude for this nurturing bread of heaven you must charm the ears of God with a voice of exultation and praise, a festal song. In the daily trials and combats arising from the flesh, the world and the devil, that are never wanting to those who live devout lives in Christ, you learn by what you experience that man's life on earth is a ceaseless warfare, and are impelled to repeat your songs day after day for every victory won. As often as temptation is overcome, an immoral habit brought under

control, an impending danger shunned, the trap of the seducer detected, when a passion long indulged is finally and perfectly allayed, or a virtue persistently desired and repeatedly sought is ultimately obtained by God's gift; so often, in the words of the prophet, let thanksgiving and joy resound. For every benefit conferred, God is to be praised in his gifts. Otherwise when the time of judgment comes, that man will be punished as an ingrate who cannot say to God: "Your statutes were my song in the land of exile."

10. Again I think that your own experience reveals to you the meaning of those psalms, which are called not Songs of Songs but Songs of the Steps, in that each one, at whatever stage of growth he be, in accord with the upward movements of his heart may choose one of these songs to praise and give glory to him who empowers you to advance. I don't know how else these words could be true: "There are shouts of joy and victory in the tents of the just." And still more that beautiful and salutary exhortation of the Apostle: "With psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles, singing and chanting to the Lord in your hearts."

11. But there is that other song which, by its unique dignity and sweetness, excels all those I have mentioned and any others there might be; hence by every right do I acclaim it as the Song of Songs. It stands at a point where all the others culminate. Only the couch of the Spirit can inspire a song like this, and only personal experience can unfold its meaning. Let those who are versed in the mystery revel in it; let all others burn with desire rather to attain to this experience than merely to learn about it. For it is not a melody that resounds abroad but the very music of the heart, not a trilling on the lips but an inward pulsing of delight, a harmony not of voices but of wills. It is a tune you will not hear in the streets, these notes do not sound where crowds assemble; only the singer hears it and the one to whom he sings - the lover and the beloved. It is preeminently a marriage song telling of chaste souls in loving embrace, of their wills in sweet concord, of the mutual exchange of the heart's affections.

12. The novices, the immature, those but recently converted from a worldly life, do not normally sing this song or hear it sung. Only the mind disciplined by persevering study, only the man whose efforts have borne fruit under God's inspiration, the man whose years, as it were, make him ripe for marriage years measured out not in time but in merits - only he is truly prepared for nuptial union with the divine partner, a union we shall describe more fully in due course. But the hour has come when both our rule and the poverty of our state demand that

we go out to work. Tomorrow, with God's help, we shall continue to speak about the kiss, because today's discourse on the title sets us free to resume where we had begun.

## **SERMON 2 VARIOUS MEANINGS OF THE KISS**

During my frequent ponderings on the burning desire with which the patriarchs longed for the incarnation of Christ, I am stung with sorrow and shame. Even now I can scarcely restrain my tears, so filled with shame am I by the lukewarmness, the frigid unconcern of these miserable times. For which of us does the consummation of that event fill with as much joy as the mere promise of it inflamed the desires of the holy men of pre-Christian times? Very soon now there will be great rejoicing as we celebrate the feast of Christ's birth. But how I wish it were inspired by his birth! All the more therefore do I pray that the intense longing of those men of old, their heartfelt expectation, may be enkindled in me by these words: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." Many an upright man in those far off times sensed within himself how profuse the graciousness that would be poured upon those lips. And intense desire springing from that perception impelled him to utter: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth," hoping with every fiber of his being that he might not be deprived of a share in a pleasure so great.

2. The conscientious man of those days might repeat to himself: "Of what use to me the wordy effusions of the prophets? Rather let him who is the most handsome of the sons of men, let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. No longer am I satisfied to listen to Moses, for he is a slow speaker and not able to speak well. Isaiah is a man of unclean lips, Jeremiah does not know how to speak, he is a child ; not one of the prophets makes an impact on me with his words. But he, the one whom they proclaim, let him speak to me, "let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." I have no desire that he should approach me in their person, or address me with their words, for they are "a watery darkness, a dense cloud;" rather in his own person "let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth;" let him whose presence is full of love, from whom exquisite doctrines flow in streams, let him become "a spring inside me, welling up to eternal life." Shall I not receive a richer infusion of grace from him whom the Father has anointed with the oil of gladness above all his rivals, provided that he will bestow on me the kiss of his mouth? For his living, active word is to me a kiss, not indeed an

adhering of the lips that can sometimes belie a union of hearts, but an unreserved infusion of joys, a revealing of mysteries, a marvelous and indistinguishable mingling of the divine light with the enlightened mind, which, joined in truth to God, is one spirit with him. With good reason then I avoid trucking with visions and dreams; I want no part with parables and figures of speech; even the very beauty of the angels can only leave me wearied. For my Jesus utterly surpasses these in his majesty and splendor. Therefore I ask of him what I ask of neither man nor angel: that he kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.

Note how I do not presume that it is with his mouth I shall be kissed, for that constitutes the unique felicity and singular privilege of the human nature he assumed. No, in the consciousness of my lowliness I ask to be kissed with the kiss of his mouth, an experience shared by all who are in a position to say: "Indeed from his fullness we have, all of us, received."

3. I must ask you to try to give your whole attention here. The mouth that kisses signifies the Word who assumes human nature; the nature assumed receives the kiss; the kiss however, that takes its being both from the giver and the receiver, is a person that is formed by both, none other than "the one mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Christ Jesus." It is for this reason that none of the saints dared say: "let him kiss me with his mouth," but rather, "with the kiss of his mouth." In this way they paid tribute to that prerogative of Christ, on whom uniquely and in one sole instance the mouth of the word was pressed, that moment when the fullness of the divinity yielded itself to him as the life of his body. A fertile kiss therefore, a marvel of stupendous self-abasement that is not a mere pressing of mouth upon mouth; it is the uniting of God with man. Normally the touch of lip on lip is the sign of the loving embrace of hearts, but this conjoining of natures brings together the human and divine, shows God reconciling "to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven." "For he is the peace between us, and has made the two into one." This was the kiss for which just men yearned under the old dispensation, foreseeing as they did that in him they would "find happiness and a crown of rejoicing," because in him were hidden "all the jewels of wisdom and knowledge.' Hence their longing to taste that fullness of his.

4. You seem to be in agreement with this explanation, but I should like you to listen to another.



Even the holy men who lived before the coming of Christ understood that God had in mind plans of peace for the human race. "Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants, the prophets." What he did reveal however was obscure to many. For in those days faith was a rare thing on the earth, and hope but a faint impulse in the heart even of many of those who looked forward to the deliverance of Israel. Those indeed who foreknew also proclaimed that Christ would come as man, and with him, peace. One of them actually said: "He himself will be peace in our land when he comes." Enlightened from above they confidently spread abroad the message that through him men would be restored to the favor of God. John, the fore-runner of the Lord, recognizing the fulfillment of that prophecy in his own time, declared: "Grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ." In our time every Christian can discover by experience that this is true.

5. In those far-off days however, while the prophets continued to foretell the covenant, and its author continued to delay his coming, the faith of the people never ceased to waver because there was no one who could redeem or save. Hence men grumbled at the postponements of the coming of this Prince of Peace so often proclaimed by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times. As doubts about the fulfillment of the prophecies began to recur, all the more eagerly did they make demands for the kiss, the sign of the promised reconciliation. It was as if a voice from among the people would challenge the prophets of peace: "How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? You are always foretelling a peace that is never realized; you promise a world of good but trouble on trouble comes." At various times in the past and in various different ways this same hope was fostered by angels among our ancestors, who in turn have passed the tidings on to us. 'Peace! Peace!' they say, "but there is no peace. If God desires to convince me of that benevolent will of his, so often vouched for by the prophets but not yet revealed by the event, then let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, and so by this token of peace make my peace secure. For how shall I any longer put my trust in mere words? It is necessary now that words be vindicated by action. If those men are God's envoys let him prove the truth of their words by his own advent, so often the keynote of their predictions, because unless he comes they can do nothing. He sent his servant bearing a staff, but neither voice nor life is forthcoming. I do not rise up, I am not awakened, I am not shaken out of the dust, nor do I breathe in hope, if the Prophet himself does not come down and kiss me with the kiss of his mouth."

6. Here we must add that he who professes to be our mediator with God is God's own Son, and he is God. But what is man that he should take notice of him, the son of man that he should be concerned about him? Where shall such as I am find the confidence, the daring, to entrust myself to him who is so majestic? How shall I, mere dust and ashes, presume that God takes an interest in me? He is entirely taken up with loving his Father, he has no need of me nor of what I possess. How then shall I find assurance that if he is my mediator he will never fail me? If it be really true, as you prophets have said, that God has determined to show mercy, to reveal himself in a more favorable light," let him establish a covenant of peace, an everlasting covenant with me" by the kiss of his mouth. If he will not revoke his given word, let him empty himself," let him humble himself, let him bend to me and kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. If the mediator is to be acceptable to both parties, equally dependable in the eyes of both, then let him who is God's Son become man, let him become the Son of Man, and fill me with assurance by this kiss of his mouth. When I come to recognize that he is truly mine, then I shall feel secure in welcoming the Son of God as mediator. Not even a shadow of mistrust can then exist, for after all he is my brother, and my own flesh. It is impossible that I should be spurned by him who is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh.

7. We should by now have come to understand how the discontent of our ancestors displayed a need for this sacrosanct kiss, that is, the mystery of the incarnate word, for faith, hard-pressed throughout the ages with trouble upon trouble, was ever on the point of failing, and a fickle people, yielding to discouragement, murmured against the promises of God. Is this a mere improvisation on my part? I suggest that you will find it to be the teaching of the Scriptures: for instance, consider the burden of complaint and murmuring in those words: "Order on order, order on order, rule on rule, rule on rule, a little here, a little there." Or those prayerful exclamations, troubled yet loyal: "Give those who wait for you their reward, and let your prophets be proved worthy of belief." Again: "Bring about what has been prophesied in your name." There too you will find those soothing promises of consolation: "Behold the Lord will appear and he will not lie. If he seems slow, wait for him, for he will surely come and he will not delay." Likewise: "His time is close at hand when he will come and his days will not be prolonged." Speaking in the name of him who is promised the prophet announces: "Behold I am coming towards you like a river of peace, and like a stream in spate with the glory of the nations." In all these statements there is evidence both of the urgency of the preachers and of the distrust of those who

listened to them. The people murmured, their faith wavered, and in the words of Isaiah: "the ambassadors of peace weep bitterly." Therefore because Christ was late in coming, and the whole human race in danger of being lost in despair, so convinced was it that human weakness was an object of contempt with no hope of the reconciliation with God through a grace so frequently promised, those good men whose faith remained strong eagerly longed for the more powerful assurance that only his human presence could convey. They prayed intensely for a sign that the covenant was about to be restored for the sake of a spiritless, faithless people.

8. Oh root of Jesse, that stands as a signal to the peoples, how many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, and never saw it!

Happy above them all is Simeon, by God's mercy still bearing fruit in old age! He rejoiced to think that he would see the long-desired sign. He saw it and was glad; and having received the kiss of peace he is allowed to go in peace, but not before he had told his audience that Jesus was born to be a sign that would be rejected. Time proved how true this was. No sooner had the sign of peace arisen than it was opposed, by those, that is, who hated peace;" for his peace is with men of good-will, but for the evil-minded he is "a stone to stumble over, a rock to bring men down." Herod accordingly was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. Christ "came to his own domain, and his own people did not accept him." Those shepherds, however, who kept watch over their flocks by night, were fortunate for they were gladdened by a vision of this sign. Even in those early days he was hiding these things from the learned and the clever, and revealing them to mere children. Herod, as you know, desired to see him, but because his motive was not genuine he did not succeed. The sign of peace was given only to men of good-will, hence to Herod and others like him was given the sign of the prophet Jonah." The angel said to the shepherds: "Here is a sign for you," you who are humble, obedient, not given to haughtiness, faithful to prayer and meditating day and night on God's law. "This is a sign for you," he said. What sign? The sign promised by the angels, sought after by the people, foretold by the prophets; this is the sign that the Lord Jesus has now brought into existence and revealed to you, a sign by which the incredulous are made believers, the dispirited are made hopeful and the fervent achieve security. This therefore is the sign for you. But as a sign what does it signify? It reveals mercy, grace, peace, the peace that has no end. And finally, the sign is this: "You will find a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." God himself, however, is in

this baby, reconciling the world to himself. He will be put to death for your sins and raised to life to justify you, so that made righteous by faith you may be at peace with God. This was the sign of peace that the Prophet once urged King Achez to ask of the Lord his God, "either from the depths of Sheol or from the heights above." But the ungodly king refused. His wretched state blinded him to the belief that in this sign the highest things above would be joined to the lowest things below in peace. This was achieved when Christ, descending into Sheol, saluted its dwellers with a holy kiss, the pledge of peace, and then going up to heaven, enabled the spirits there to share in the same pledge in joy without end.

9. I must end this sermon. But let me sum up briefly the points we have raised. It would seem that this holy kiss was of necessity bestowed on the world for two reasons. Without it the faith of those who wavered would not have been strengthened, nor the desires of the fervent appeased. Moreover, this kiss is no other than the Mediator between God and man, himself a man, Christ Jesus, who with the Father and Holy Spirit lives and reigns as God for ever and ever. Amen.

### **SERMON 3 THE KISS OF THE LORD'S FEET, HANDS AND MOUTH**

Today the text we are to study is the book of our own experience. You must therefore turn your attention inwards, each one must take note of his own particular awareness of the things I am about to discuss. I am attempting to discover if any of you has been privileged to say from his heart: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." Those to whom it is given to utter these words sincerely are comparatively few, but any one who has received this mystical kiss from the mouth of Christ at least once, seeks again that intimate experience, and eagerly looks for its frequent renewal. I think that nobody can grasp what it is except the one who receives it. For it is "a hidden manna," and only he who eats it still hungers for more. It is "a sealed fountain" to which no stranger has access; only he who drinks still thirsts for more. Listen to one who has had the experience, how urgently he demands: "Be my savior again, renew my joy." But a soul like mine, burdened with sins, still subject to carnal passions, devoid of any knowledge of spiritual delights, may not presume to make such a request, almost totally unacquainted as it is with the joys of the supernatural life.

2. I should like however to point out to persons like this that there is an

appropriate place for them on the way of salvation. They may not rashly aspire to the lips of a most benign Bridegroom, but let them prostrate with me in fear at the feet of a most severe Lord. Like the publican full of misgiving, they must turn their eyes to the earth rather than up to heaven. Eyes that are accustomed only to darkness will be dazzled by the brightness of the spiritual world, overpowered by its splendor, repulsed by its peerless radiance and whelmed again in a gloom more dense than before. All you who are conscious of sin, do not regard as unworthy and despicable that position where the holy sinner laid down her sins, and put on the garment of holiness. There the Ethiopian changed her skin, and, cleansed to a new brightness, could confidently and legitimately respond to those who insulted her: "I am black but lovely, daughters of Jerusalem." You may ask what skill enabled her to accomplish this change, or on what grounds did she merit it? I can tell you in a few words. She wept bitterly, she sighed deeply from her heart, she sobbed with a repentance that shook her very being, till the evil that inflamed her passions was cleansed away. The heavenly physician came with speed to her aid, because "his word runs swiftly." Perhaps you think the Word of God is not a medicine? Surely it is, a medicine strong and pungent, testing the mind and the heart. "The Word of God is something alive and active. It cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely. It can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or the joints from the marrow: it can judge the secret thoughts." It is up to you, wretched sinner, to humble yourself as this happy penitent did so that you may be rid of your wretchedness. Prostrate yourself on the ground, take hold of his feet, soothe them with kisses, sprinkle them with your tears and so wash not them but yourself. Thus you will become one of the "flock of shorn ewes as they come up from the washing." But even then you may not dare to lift up a face suffused with shame and grief, until you hear the sentence: "Your sins are forgiven," to be followed by the summons: "Awake, awake, captive of Zion, awake, shake off the dust."

3. Though you have made a beginning by kissing the feet, you may not presume to rise at once by impulse to the kiss of the mouth; there is a step to be surmounted in between, an intervening kiss on the hand for which I offer the following explanation. If Jesus says to me: "Your sins are forgiven," what will it profit me if I do not cease from sinning? I have taken off my tunic, am I to put it on again? And if I do, what have I gained? If I soil my feet again after washing them, is the washing of any benefit? Long did I lie in the slough of the marsh, filthy with all kinds of vices; if I return to it again I shall be worse than when I first wallowed in it. On top of that I recall that he who healed me said to me as he

exercised his mercy: "Now you are well again, be sure not to sin any more, or something worse may happen to you." He, however, who gave me the grace to repent, must also give me the power to persevere, lest by repeating my sins I should end up by being worse than I was before. Woe to me then, repentant though I be, if he without whom I can do nothing should suddenly withdraw his supporting hand. I really mean nothing; of myself I can achieve neither repentance nor perseverance, and for that reason I pay heed to the Wise Man's advice: "Do not repeat yourself at your prayers." The Judge's threat to the tree that did not yield good fruit is another thing that makes me fearful. For these various reasons I muse confess that I am not entirely satisfied with the first grace by which I am enabled to repent of my sins; I must have the second as well, and so bear fruits that befit repentance, that I may not return like the dog to its vomit.

4. I am now able to see what I must seek for and receive before I may hope to attain to a higher and holier state. I do not wish to be suddenly on the heights, my desire is to advance by degrees. The impudence of the sinner displeases God as much as the modesty of the penitent gives him pleasure. You will please him more readily if you live within the limits proper to you, and do not set your sights at things beyond you. It is a long and formidable leap from the foot to the mouth, a manner of approach that is not commendable. Consider for a moment: still tarnished as you are with the dust of sin, would you dare touch those sacred lips? Yesterday you were lifted from the mud, today you wish to encounter the glory of his face? No, his hand must be your guide to that end. First it must cleanse your stains, then it must raise you up. How raise you? By giving you the grace to dare to aspire. You wonder what this may be. I see it as the grace of the beauty of temperance and the fruits that befit repentance, the works of the religious man. These are the instruments that will lift you from the dunghills and cause your hopes to soar. On receiving such a grace then, you must kiss his hand, that is, you must give glory to his name, not to yourself. First of all you must glorify him because he has forgiven your sins, secondly because he has adorned you with virtues. Otherwise you will need a bold front to face reproaches such as these: "What do you have that was not given to you? And if it was given; how can you boast as though it were not?"

5. Once you have had this twofold experience of God's benevolence in these two kisses, you need no longer feel abashed in aspiring to a holier intimacy. Growth in grace brings expansion of confidence You will love with greater ardor, and

knock on the door with greater assurance, in order to gain what you perceive to be still wanting to you. "The one who knocks will always have the door opened to him." It is my belief that to a person so disposed, God will not refuse that most intimate kiss of all, a mystery of supreme generosity and ineffable sweetness. You have seen the way that we must follow, the order of procedure: first, we cast ourselves at his feet, we weep before the Lord who made us, deploring the evil we have done. Then we reach out for the hand that will lift us up, that will steady our trembling knees. And finally, when we shall have obtained these favors through many prayers and tears, we humbly dare to raise our eyes to his mouth, so divinely beautiful, not merely to gaze upon it, but I say it with fear and trembling - to receive its kiss. "Christ the Lord is a Spirit before our face," and he who is joined to him in a holy kiss becomes through his good pleasure, one spirit with him.

6. To you, Lord Jesus, how truly my heart has said: "My face looks to you. Lord, I do seek your face." In the dawn you brought me proof of your love, in my first approach to kiss your revered feet you forgave my evil ways as I lay in the dust. With the advancement of the day you gave your servant reason to rejoice" when, in the kiss of the hand, you imparted the grace to live rightly. And now what remains, O good Jesus, except that suffused as I am with the fullness of your light, and while my spirit is fervent, you would graciously bestow on me the kiss of your mouth, and give me unbounded joy in your presence. Serenely lovable above all others, tell me where will you lead your flock to graze, where will you rest it at noon?" Dear brothers, surely it is wonderful for us to be here, but the burden of the day calls us elsewhere. These guests, whose arrival has just now been announced to us, compel me to break off rather than to conclude a talk that I enjoy so much. So I go to meet the guests, to make sure that the duty of charity, of which we have been speaking, may not suffer neglect, that we may not hear it said of us: "They do not practice what they preach." Do you pray in the meantime that God may accept the homage of my lips for your spiritual welfare, and for the praise and glory of his name.

#### **SERMON 4 THE KISS OF THE LORD'S FEET, HANDS AND MOUTH**

Yesterday our talk dealt with three stages of the soul's progress under the figure of the three kisses. You still remember this, I hope, for today I intend to continue

that same discussion, according as God in his goodness may provide for one so needy. We said, as you remember, that these kisses were given to the feet, the hand and the mouth, in that order. The first is the sign of a genuine conversion of life, the second is accorded to those making progress, the third is the experience of only a few of the more perfect. The book of Scripture that we have undertaken to expound begins with this last kiss, but I have added the other two in the hope that you will attain a better understanding of the last. I leave it to you to judge whether this was necessary, but I do really think that the very nature of the discourse clearly suggests that they be included. And I should be surprised if you did not see that she who said: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth," wished to make a distinction between the kiss of the mouth and another or several other kisses. It might have been enough for her to have said simply: "Let him kiss me." Why then should she distinctly and pointedly add: "with the kiss of his mouth," a usage that is certainly not customary? Is it not that she wished to indicate that this kiss at the summit of love's intimacy is not the sole one? People normally say, do they not: "Kiss me," or "Give me a kiss"? Nobody adds the words: "with your mouth," or, "with the kiss of your mouth." When we wish to kiss somebody, we do not have to state explicitly what we want when we offer our lips to each other. For example, St John's story of Christ's reception of the traitor's kiss simply says: "He kissed him," without adding "with his mouth or with the kiss of his mouth." This is normal procedure then both in speech and in writing. We have here three stages of the soul's growth in love, three stages of its advance toward perfection that are sufficiently known and intelligible to those who have experienced them. There is first the forgiveness of sins, then the grace that follows on good deeds, and finally that contemplative gift by which a kind and beneficent Lord shows himself to the soul with as much clarity as bodily frailty can endure.

2. Perhaps I should here attempt a better explanation of my reason for calling the first two favors kisses. We all know that the kiss is a sign of peace. If what Scripture says is true: "Our iniquities have made a gulf between us and God," then peace can be attained only when the intervening gulf is bridged. When therefore we make satisfaction and become reconciled by the re-joining of the cleavage caused by sin, in what better way can I describe the favor we receive than as a kiss of peace? Nor is there a more becoming place for this kiss than at the feet; the amends we make for the pride of our transgressions ought to be humble and diffident.



3. But when God endows us with the more ample grace of a sweet friendship with him, in order to enable us to live with a virtue that is worthy of such a relationship, we tend to raise our heads from the dust with a greater confidence for the purpose of kissing, as is the custom, the hand of our benefactor. It is essential however that we should not make this favor the occasion of self-glorification, we must give the glory to him from whom it comes. For if you glory in yourself rather than in the Lord, it is your own hand that you kiss, not his, which, according to the words of Job, is the greatest evil and a denial of God. If therefore, as Scripture suggests, the seeking of one's own glory is like kissing one's own hand, then he who gives glory to God is quite properly said to be kissing God's hand. We see this to be the case among men. Slaves beg pardon of their offended masters by kissing their feet, and the poor kiss their benefactor's hand when they receive an alms.

4. This poses a problem for you? God is spirit, his simple substance cannot be considered to have bodily members, so then, you say, show us what you mean by the hands and feet of God; explain to us the kiss of these hands and feet. But if I in turn put a question to my critic about the mouth of God - for, after all, Scripture does speak of the kiss of the mouth - will he tell me that this of course does refer to God. Surely if we attribute a mouth to God we may also attribute hands and feet, for, if he lacks these latter he must lack the former too.

But God has a mouth by which "he teaches men knowledge," he has a hand with which "he provides for all living creatures," and he has feet for which the earth is a footstool." When the sinners of the earth are converted from their ways, it is in abasement before these feet that they make satisfaction. I allow of course that God does not have these members by his nature, they represent certain modes of our encounter with him. The heartfelt desire to admit one's guilt brings a man down in lowliness before God, as it were to his feet; the heartfelt devotion of a worshiper finds in God renewal and refreshment, the touch, as it were, of his hand, and the delights of contemplation lead on to that ecstatic repose that is the fruit of the kiss of his mouth. Because his providence rules over all, he is all things to all, yet, to speak with accuracy, he is in no way what these things are. If we consider him in himself, his home is in inaccessible light, his peace is so much greater than we can understand, his wisdom has no bounds. No one can measure his greatness, no man can see him and live. Yet he who by his very nature is the principle through whom all creatures spring into being, cannot be far from any of us, since without him all are nothing. More wonderful still, though no

one can be more intimately present to us than he, no one is more incomprehensible. For what is more intimate to anything than its own being? And yet, what is more incomprehensible to any of us than the being of all things? Of course when I say that God is the being of all things, I do not wish it to be understood in the sense that he and they are identical, but rather in the sense of the words of Scripture: "All that exists comes from him, all is by him and in him." He is the creator, the efficient cause, not the material, of every creature. Such is the way the God whose majesty is so great has decided to be present to his creatures: as the being of all things that are, as the life of all things that live; a light to all those who think, virtue to all who think rightly and glory to those who prevail in life's battle.

In this work of creation, of government, of administration, of imparting motion, of steering toward particular ends, of renewal and strengthening, he has no need of bodily instruments. By his word alone he had made all things, both corporeal and spiritual. Souls have a need for bodies, and bodies in turn a need for senses, if they are to know and influence each other. Not so the omnipotent God, who by the immediate act of his will, and that alone both creates and governs at his good pleasure. His influence touches whom he wills, as much as he wills, without calling on the aid or service of bodily powers. What possible help could he receive from bodily senses when he decides to take cognizance of the things he brought into beings. Nothing has the remotest chance of hiding from him, or of escaping that light of his that penetrates everywhere; sense awareness can never be the medium of his knowledge. Not merely does he know all things without a body's intervention, he also makes himself known to the pure in heart without the need for recourse to it. I have spoken extensively on this point in order to make it more plain for you, but now pressure of time demands that I come to an end, so we must postpone further discussion till tomorrow.

## **SERMON 5 ON THE FOUR KINDS OF SPIRITS**

As you know, spirits can be divided into classes: that of the animal, that of man, that of the angel, and that of God who created all the others. Each of these, with one exception, needs a body or a body's likeness, either for its own sake or for the sake of others or for both. The exception is he whom every creature, whether corporeal or spiritual, is called on to acknowledge in sentiments like the Psalmist: "You are my God because you have no need of my goods." If we consider the

animal we see that its spirit, its life principle, cannot even exist without a body. When the animal dies its soul ceases to live at the same moment that it ceases to impart life. We indeed continue to live after the body's death, but only by means of the body do we gain those merits that lead to a life of blessedness. St Paul sensed this, saying: "The invisible things of God are understood through the things he has made." All creatures that he has made, creatures that possess a body and are therefore visible, can be understood by our minds only through the body's instrumentality. Therefore our souls have need of a body. Without it we cannot attain to that form of knowledge by which alone we are elevated toward the contemplation of truths essential to happiness. If one of you will object that baptized infants who die before acquiring a knowledge of the material creation are believed nevertheless to enter heaven, I shall reply briefly that this is a gift of grace, not a reward of merit. For the moment this discussion deals with normal processes, not with the special interventions of God.

2. Let us now study the case of heavenly spirits. We can be absolutely sure that these have a need of bodies from those divinely inspired words: "Are they not all spirits whose work is service, sent to help those who will be the heirs of salvation?" How will it be possible for them to fulfill this service without a body, especially among beings who possess bodies? Is it not true that only creatures with bodies can run to and fro and pass from place to place? Do we not know on unimpeachable authority that angels have frequently acted that way? You recall how they were seen by the patriarchs of old, how they entered their tents, shared their meal, and had their feet washed. And so we see that though both animal and angelic spirits have need of bodies, it is not for their own sakes but in order to render some service to others.

3. The animal kingdom is destined by nature to serve, and that service is fulfilled in alleviating the temporal and physical needs of man; the animal spirit or soul is limited by time, it dies with the body. You know then "the slave does not continue in the house forever," but those who treat him well will discover that the usage of this temporal service will redound to eternal rewards. The angel, however, in the freedom of his spirit, applies himself with eagerness to the demands of his duty, which is to bring prompt and swift assistance to us mortals in our striving for the blessings that are to come. He knows that we are destined to be fellow-citizens with him; and co-heirs of the bliss of heaven. Therefore both the animal and the angel need bodies that they might be of help to us, the first that he may give us the service appropriate to his nature, the second that he may

lovingly support us. What benefit they themselves may derive from a body I cannot see, at least with regard to eternal life. The spirit of the animal can indeed perceive corporeal things by means of the body, but is this body of such potential value to him that the material world which he experiences through the senses enables him to advance to a knowledge of spiritual and intellectual truths? Surely not. On the other hand, within the limits of its corporeal and temporal service, the body does provide a gateway to a knowledge of these truths for those who transmute their usage of the things of time into coin of eternal reward, "dealing with this world as though they had no dealing with it."

4. We must understand too that if the angel can soar to a grasp of the highest truths and penetrate their profoundest depths, he does so by the vital force and kinship of his nature rather than with the aid of a body, or with the awareness of things that bodily senses provide. St Paul implied this when he said: "The invisible things of God are understood through the things he has made," adding the qualification, "by the creature of the world." Because this is not so for the creature of heaven. For, what the spirit clothed in flesh and dwelling on the earth strives to achieve gradually and little by little, through the knowledge it derives from the senses, that same the dweller of the heavens attains with all speed and ease, because of the native fineness and sublime quality of its being. No prop of bodily sense sustains its poise, no bodily member ministers aid to its effort, no bodily medicine whatsoever contributes to its vision. Why should they search for spiritual meanings among bodily substances when they can find them in the book of life without any discordance, and understand them without any hardship. Why should a man work his sweat out winnowing grain from the chaff, pressing wine from grapes and oil from olives if he has an abundance of all these things ready to hand? Who will beg his food from door to door when his own house is stocked with bread? Will he bother to dig a well, to explore with might and main for springs of water in the bowels of the earth, for whom a burbling fountain pours out full-flowing, limpid streams? Neither angelic nor brute spirit therefore can benefit from corporeal aids in acquiring the knowledge that makes a spiritual being happy. The brute's natural stupidity renders him incapable of that knowledge, while the angel, by a prerogative of splendor and excellence, has no need of a bodily intermediary.

5. We come now to the spirit of man. This, since it holds a middle place between the extremes of bestial and angelic spirits, manifestly has a twofold need of a body: without it the soul can act neither for its own advantage nor for the benefit

of others. For, to say nothing of the other members of the body or of the duties they perform, how, I ask, can you instruct the listener if you have no tongue, or receive instruction if you have no ear ?

6. Therefore, since without the support of the body the brute spirit cannot offer the service it owes, nor the heavenly spirit fulfill its labor of love, nor the rational spirit of man succeed in providing for its own and its neighbor's salvation, it follows that every created spirit certainly has a need of bodily faculties whether it be mercy to assist others, or, as in the case of man, to assist as well as being assisted. What then if there be some living things whose existence seems to confer no benefit on themselves, nor to minister in any obvious way to the needs of humanity? Well, are they not good to look at, if not to use? They are for the mind's study rather than the body's utility, there their advantage lies. Even if injurious, and an obstacle to human welfare in this world, their bodies still serve a purpose for all those whom he had called according to his purpose to be saints. If these creatures do not provide food or perform a service, they certainly make man use his wits in accord with that progress in understanding common to all who enjoy the use of reason, by which the mysteries of God may be apprehended and contemplated through the things he has made. For both the devil and his satellites, whose intentions are always evil are ever bent on hurting those who do what is right. To these latter St Peter said "Who can hurt you if you are determined to do only what is right?" God forbid that they should be able to harm you. The truth rather is that in spite of themselves they benefit the good.

7. As for the rest, whether the bodies of angels be natural to them as bodies are to men; whether, immortal though they be, their bodies have an animal nature like man's, which in this life is not immortal; whether they change these bodies and turn them into whatever form and figure suits them when they wish to become visible, imparting to them the density and solidity that fits their purpose, while at the same time, in the reality of their own nature with its essential subtlety, they remain impalpable to us and beyond our power of vision; or whether again, while continuing to exist as simple spiritual substances, they merely assume bodies when they find a need for them and then, once the need has passed, allow them to dissolve again into the elements from which they were formed— all these are questions which I prefer that you should not ask me. The Fathers seem to have held divergent views on the problem, and I must confess that I cannot come to a decision about the view I might be justified in teaching. But I am of the opinion that knowledge of these matters would not contribute

greatly to your spiritual progress.

8. Try to understand this however, that no created spirit can of itself act directly on our minds. This means that without the mediation of a bodily instrument it cannot make contact with or infuse itself into our minds, so that thereby we either acquire knowledge or increase it, acquire virtue or improve on it. No angel, no created spirit has power to influence me in this way, nor can I influence them. Even the angels lack this power over each other.

That is a prerogative reserved to that supreme and infinite Spirit, who alone, when he imparts instruction to man or angel, does not require an ear to hear him nor a mouth to speak. He communicates himself directly to the mind, he makes himself known directly; a pure spirit himself, he is received by us in proportion to our rectitude. He alone has need of no one, he alone, by reason of his omnipotent will, is sufficient for himself and for all.

9. Nevertheless, there are boundless and countless achievements that he carries through by means of his subject creatures, whether corporeal or spiritual, but he uses them as master rather than as suppliant. For example, he now employs my tongue for his purpose of instructing you, when he could certainly impart the same knowledge directly with greater facility on his part and more pleasure for you. This mode of acting that he has chosen represents an indulgence on his part, not indigence. He makes this promotion of your welfare an occasion of merit for me; it does not mean that he needs my assistance. This is a truth that every man should remember when he does good deeds, lest he give glory to himself and not to the Lord for the fruits of grace. There is furthermore the case of the person, be he bad angel or bad man, who performs good deeds against his will. It is plain that the good of which he is the agent does not benefit himself since no good can benefit one whose will is set against it. He is therefore merely a dispenser of good, but, I know not why, we seem to feel that the good which comes to us through an evil agent is on that account more gratifying and pleasurable. This is the reason why God makes use of the wicked to benefit the just; it by no means implies that he needs their help in doing good.

10. And who will doubt that God has less need still of those creatures that lack sense or reason? But when these do have a share in the doing of good we are reminded that all creatures are the servants of that God who can so rightly say: "The world is mine." Again, because he knows the means that best suit his

purpose, he does not choose a bodily creature for the sake of the efficacy of its action but rather for the fittingness of it. Granted then that bodily agents are often and opportunely used in promoting the works of God, for example, the showers that quicken the seeds, that multiply the crops and ripen the fruit, what need has he, I ask, for a body of his own when to his least desire all bodies, both in heaven and on earth, are equally obedient? A body of his own would be superfluous to one for whom none exists outside his sway. But if I were to include in this present sermon all the points that might be dealt with on this subject, it would be unreasonably prolonged, and I should perhaps overtax the endurance of some. We shall find another occasion to discuss them.

## **SERMON 6 GOD'S INFINITE POWER, MERCY AND JUDGMENT**

In order to connect this talk with my last, let me recall to your minds what I then said. The supreme and infinite Spirit, and he alone, has no need of a bodily faculty or of any bodily assistance, in the accomplishment of all that he wishes to do or permit. We may with perfect confidence then, assert that God is truly an immaterial being, just as he is truly immortal. He alone in the world of spirits so far transcends the efficacy of all corporeal beings, that not only is he entirely independent of bodily aid in all the works that he undertakes, but by a simple gesture of his will he is able to achieve his purpose when and as he pleases. His is the sole sovereign power, therefore, that neither for intrinsic nor extrinsic reasons requires the support of a bodily form. His omnipotent will finds response that is instant and effectual. All that is lofty bends to it, all that is stubborn yields, every creature pays it court. It needs no other power, bodily or spiritual, to intervene on its behalf. He needs no tongue to teach or advise, no hand to help or uphold, no feet to run to the rescue when danger looms.

2. Our ancestors down through the ages experienced these ways of God repeatedly; his gifts pursued them without fail, but the benefactor's hand was hidden. He indeed deployed his strength from one end of the earth to the other, yet ordering all things with gentleness, but men remained insensitive to him. They enjoyed the largess the Lord poured out, but they failed to recognize him as the Lord of hosts, deceived by the tranquility that shrouded his dealings with men. Though they owed him their being they did not live in his presence. They lived through him, but not for him. What understanding they possessed was from

him, but him they failed to understand. They were alienated, ungrateful, irrational. Their being, their life, their reason, all these they ascribed to nature, or, more foolishly still, to chance. Many again arrogantly assumed that the workings of God's providence were the fruit of their own labor and strength. What wonders have not deceitful spirits attributed to their own powers, what wonders are attributed to the sun and moon, to the forces of earth and water, even to the handicrafts of mere mortals! Herbs, trees and the smallest and commonest of seeds were honored as gods.

3. How sad indeed that men should degrade and exchange the one who was their glory for the image of a grass-eating ox. But God had mercy on their errors: coming forth from his shady and thickly covered mountains he pitched his tent in the sun. He became incarnate for the sake of carnal men, that he might induce them to relish the life of the Spirit. In the body and through the body he performed works of which not man but God was the author. He showed by his commands that chance events, were subject to his law. He revealed the foolishness of human wisdom, and overthrew the tyranny of evil spirits, thereby manifestly showing that when these things were done in past ages they were done by him. In the body, I repeat, and through the body, he performed wonderful deeds with an authority that was obvious. He proclaimed the message of salvation and endured outrage, thus clearly demonstrating that he it was whose invisible power created the world, whose wisdom governed it, and whose benevolence protected it. And finally, by preaching the good news to thankless crowds, by proving himself with signs to men without faith and praying for those who crucified him, did he not plainly declare himself to be that same person who, in union with the Father, daily causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike? For this is what he himself said: "If I am not doing my Father's work, there is no need to believe me."

4. See him then, instructing the disciples on the mountain by word of mouth at the same time that he enlightens heaven's angels in silence. See how at the touch of a fleshly hand a leper is healed, blindness is dispelled, the deaf are empowered to hear, the dumb to speak, the sinking disciple is rescued on the lake and you will surely recognize him as the one to whom David long ago uttered the words: "You open your hand, you satisfy the desire of every living thing;" And again: "When you open your hand all are filled with your goodness." See how, prostrate at his human feet, the penitent finds assurance as she is told; "Your sins are forgiven." She knows that he is the one of whom she had read in



words composed long ago: "The devil shall go forth before his feet." For when sin is forgiven it is certain that the devil is driven out from the sinner's heart, and for this reason Christ embraced all sinners in his statement: "Now sentence is being passed on this world, now the prince of this world is overthrown." God removes the sin of the one who makes humble confession, and thereby the devil loses the sovereignty he had gained over the human heart.

5. Again you find him with those feet of flesh walking on the waters, him of whom the Psalmist long before the incarnation said: "You strode across the sea, you marched across the ocean," by which he meant: you tread under foot the puffed up hearts of the proud, you repress the surging passions of sensual men; the wicked are won over to goodness, the haughty to lowliness. And because God acts invisibly in accomplishing this, the sensual man fails to perceive the doer. So the Psalmist adds: ". . . but your steps could not be seen." In connection with this we may understand the Father's words to his Son: "Sit at my right hand and I will make your enemies a footstool for you," that is, I shall subjugate to your will all those who spurn you, either against their will, and then they will be miserable, or with that willingness which will make them blessed. Because carnal men did not perceive this work of the Spirit -- "the animal man does not perceive anything of the Spirit of God" -- it was necessary that the sinner should receive pardon for her sins while lying prone at God's feet of flesh, kissing these same feet with her lips of flesh. In this way that change of the right hand of the Most High, by which in a wonderful but invisible manner he leads the wicked to repentance, is made manifest to those in bondage to the senses.

6. However, I must not omit to speak of those spiritual feet of God to which the penitent's first kiss, understood in a spiritual sense, ought to be directed. Well do I know the inquisitive bent of your minds, that allows nothing whatever to pass without scrutiny. Nor must we disdain to consider what are those feet by which Scripture so frequently draws our attention to God. At one time he is described as standing: "We will adore in the place where his feet stood;" at another time as walking: "I will dwell in the midst of them and I will walk among them;" and again as running: "He exulted like a hero to run his race." If it seemed right to St Paul to describe Christ's head in terms of the divinity, it should not seem unreasonable to us to ascribe the feet to his humanity. Let us call one of these feet mercy, the other judgment. You are familiar with these two words, they both occur together, as you remember, in several passages of Scripture. That God assumed the foot of mercy in the flesh to which he united himself, is taught in the Epistle to the

Hebrews, which speaks of Christ as one who has been tempted in every way that we are, though he is without sin, that he might become merciful. And the other foot that is called judgment? Does not God made man plainly point out that this also belongs to the assumed humanity where he declares: "Because he is the Son of Man the Father has appointed him supreme judge."

7. With these two feet, therefore, so aptly united and controlled by the divine head, he who was the invisible Emmanuel is born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, appears on earth and moves among men. It is on these feet that, in a spiritual, invisible manner, he still goes about doing good and curing all who have fallen into the power of the devil. With these very feet he finds his way into the souls of his lovers, tirelessly enlightening and searching the hearts and loins of the faithful. See if these are not those legs of the Bridegroom, which the bride so magnificently praises in subsequent verses, comparing them, if I mistake not, to "alabaster columns set in sockets of pure gold." How beautiful this is, because in very truth, in the incarnate wisdom of God, signified by the gold, mercy and truth have met each other. Therefore all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth.

8. Happy is the man then in whose soul the Lord Jesus once sets these feet of his. There are two signs by which you may recognize such a one, for he cannot but bear upon him the imprint of these divine footsteps. These signs are fear and hope, the former presenting the imprint of judgment, the latter that of mercy. Truly, the Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, and in them that hope in his mercy, for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, hope the growth of wisdom. Its perfection charity reserves to itself. If all this be true, then obviously this first kiss, given to the feet, brings forth no small fruit. But of one thing you must beware, that you do not neglect either of these feet. If, for instance, you feel deep sorrow for your sins along with the fear of the judgment, you have pressed your lips on the imprint of truth and of judgment. But if you temper that fear and sorrow with the thought of God's goodness and the hope of obtaining his pardon, you will realize that you have also embraced the foot of his mercy. It is clearly inexpedient to kiss one without the other; a man who thinks only of the judgment will fall into the pit of despair, another who deceitfully flatters God's mercy gives birth to a pernicious security.

9. I myself, however wretched I may be, have been occasionally privileged to sit at the feet of the Lord Jesus, and to the extent that his merciful love allowed, have embraced with all my heart, now one, now the other, of these feet. And if,

as happened at times, I should grow forgetful of his mercy, and with a stricken conscience become too deeply involved in the thought of the judgment, sooner or later I was cast down in unbelievable fear and shameful misery, enveloped in a frightful gloom out of which I cried in dismay: "Who has yet felt the full force of your fury, or learnt to fear the violence of your rage?" But if on escaping from this I should cling more than was becoming to the foot of mercy, the opposite happened. I became dissipated, indifferent, negligent; lukewarm at prayer, languid at work, always on the watch for a laugh, inclined to say the wrong thing. And my interior was no steadier than my behavior. But you know what a teacher experience is; no longer of judgment alone or mercy alone, but of mercy and judgment I will sing to you, O Lord. I shall never forget your precepts, mercy and judgment will be the theme of my songs in the house of my pilgrimage, until one day when mercy triumphs over judgment, my wretchedness will cease to smart, and my heart, silent no longer, will sing to you. It will be the end of sorrow.

## **SERMON 7 INTIMACIES OF THE LOVE OF GOD**

I can see now that I involved myself in more work when I thoughtlessly laid myself open to your questions! After I had introduced the subject of the first kiss I went on to explain, rather protractedly, the spiritual feet of God with their signification and names. Now you proceed to ask about the hand to which the second kiss is given. Well -- I submit! I must try to comply with your wishes; and even more than you wish; I shall treat not only of one hand but of two, each under a particular name. One I shall call liberality because it gives generously; the other fortitude because it powerfully defends whatever it gives. One who will not be found ungrateful must kiss each of these hands, in order to acknowledge and praise God as the giver and conserver of all-good things.

I should think that by now I have said enough about these two kisses, so we shall pass on to the third.

2. "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth," she said. Now who is this "she"? The bride. But why bride? Because she is the soul thirsting for God. In order to clarify for you the characteristics of the bride, I shall deal briefly with the diverse affective relationships between persons. Fear motivates a slave's attitude to his master, gain that of wage-earner to his employer, the learner is attentive to his teacher, the son is respectful to his father. But the one who asks for a kiss, she is

a lover. Among all the natural endowments of man love holds first place, especially when it is directed to God, who is the source whence it comes. No sweeter names can be found to embody that sweet interflow of affections between the Word and the soul, than bridegroom and bride. Between these all things are equally shared, there are no selfish reservations, nothing that causes division. They share the same inheritance, the same table, the same home, the same marriage-bed, they are flesh of each other's flesh. "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body." The bride for her part is bidden to "forget her nation and her ancestral home," so that the bridegroom may fall in love with her beauty. Therefore if a love relationship is the special and outstanding characteristic of the bride and groom, it is not unfitting to call the soul that loves God a bride. Now one who asks for a kiss is in love. It is not for liberty that she asks, nor for an award, not for an inheritance nor even knowledge, but for a kiss. It is obviously the request of a bride who is chaste, who breathes forth a love that is holy, a love whose ardor she cannot entirely disguise. For note how abruptly she bursts into speech. About to ask a great favor from a great personage, she does not resort, as others do, to the arts of seduction, she makes no devious or fawning solicitations for the prize that she covets. There is no preamble, no attempt to conciliate favor. No, but with a spontaneous outburst from the abundance of her heart, direct even to the point of boldness, she says: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth."

3. Does not this seem to you to indicate that she wished to say: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides you."

Her love is surely chaste when it seeks the person whom she loves, and not some other thing of his. It is a holy love, the impulse of an upright spirit rather than of carnal desire. And it is an ardent love, blinded by its own excess to the majesty of the beloved. For what are the facts? He is the one at whose glance the earth trembles, and does she demand that he give her a kiss? Can she be possibly drunk? Absolutely drunk! And the reason? It seems most probable that when she uttered those passionate words she had just come out from the cellar of wine; afterwards she boasts of having been there. David in his turn cried out to God concerning people such as the bride: "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of your house; and you will make them drink of the torrent of your pleasure." How great this power of love: what great confidence and freedom of spirit! What is more manifest than that fear is driven out by perfect love!

4. There is a certain modesty in the fact that she directs that utterance of hers not to the Bridegroom himself but to others, as if he were absent: "Let him kiss me," she exclaimed, "with the kiss of his mouth." A sublime favor is petitioned, and hence there is need that the petitioner should be commended by a becoming modesty in the manner of the request. One who seeks access to the interior of the home goes round to the intimate friends or members of the household to attain what he desires. In this present instance who might these people be? In my opinion they are the holy angels who wait on us as we pray, who offer to God the petitions and desires of men, at least of those men whose prayer they recognize to be sincere, free from anger and dissension. We find proof of this in the words of the angel to Tobias: "When you prayed with tears and buried the dead, and left your dinner and hid the dead by day in your house, and buried them by night, I offered your prayer to the Lord." I feel that you are fully persuaded of this from many other testimonies of Scripture. That the holy angels do condescend to mingle with us when we praise God in psalmody is very clearly stated by the Psalmist: "The princes went before, joined with the singers, in the midst of young damsels playing on timbrels." He also said: "I will sing praise to you in the sight of the angels."

For this reason it makes me sad to see some of you deep in the throes of sleep during the night office, to see that instead of showing reverence for those princely citizens of heaven you appear like corpses. When you are fervent they respond with eagerness and are filled with delight in participating in your solemn offices. What I fear is that one day, repelled by our sloth, they will angrily depart. Too late then shall we remorsefully cry out to God: "You have turned my friends away from me and made me repulsive to them;" or again: "You have turned my friends and neighbors from me, my acquaintances from my misery;" or yet again: "They that were near me stood afar off, and they that sought my soul used violence." It is certain indeed that if the good spirits withdraw from us, we shall not easily withstand the obsessions of the evil ones. And so I must warn the slothful: "Cursed be he who does the work of God half-heartedly." It is not I but the Lord who says: "Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, I will spew you out of my mouth." Be mindful then of these angelic princes when you go to pray or to sing the psalms; stand with disciplined reverence and be proud that your angels continuously see the face of the Father. Since they are all spirits whose work is service, sent to help those who will be the heirs of salvation, they bear our prayers to God in heaven and return laden with graces for us. Let us make use of the service of those in whose company our lot is cast, that by the

mouths of children and babes in arms praise may be made perfect. Let us invite them: "Sing praises to God, sing praises!" And let us hear them in turn responding: "Sing praises to our king, sing praises!"

5. Joined therefore as you are in songs of praise with heaven's own singers, since you too are citizens like all the saints, and part of God's household, sing wisely. As food is sweet to the palate, so does a psalm delight the heart. But the soul that is sincere and wise will not fail to chew the psalm with the teeth as it were of the mind, because if he swallows it in a lump, without proper mastication, the palate will be cheated of the delicious flavor, sweeter even than honey that drips from the comb. Let us with the Apostles offer a honey-comb at the table of the Lord in the heavenly banquet. As honey flows from the comb so should devotion flow from the words; otherwise if one attempts to assimilate them without the condiment of the Spirit "the written letters bring death." But if like St. Paul you sing praises not only with the spirit but with the mind as well, you too will experience the truth of Jesus' statement: "The words I have spoken to you are spirit, and they are life;" the truth too of the words of Wisdom: "My spirit is sweet above honey."

6. Doing this your soul shall be delighted in fatness, you will find your holocaust acceptable; you will conciliate the king, give pleasure to his princes and win the favor of the whole assembly above. And when they smell this sweet fragrance in the heavens, they will surely say of you too: "What is this coming up from the desert like a column of smoke, breathing of myrrh and frankincense and every perfume the merchant knows?"

"The princes of Judah," the Psalmist exclaimed, "are their leaders, the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali;" the angelic princes are the leaders of those whose work is the praise of God; who live lives of continence, lives of contemplation. Our angelic princes know how pleasing to their King are the praises of psalmody, the fortitude of chaste souls, the singleness of purpose of contemplatives; and they are eager to discover in us these and other first-fruits of the Spirit, which are none other than the first and purest fruits of wisdom. You are not unaware that in Hebrew the word Judah means one who praises or makes acknowledgment, the word Zebulun, a fortified dwelling, and Naphtali, a swift hind, whose powers of agile leaping signify the ecstatic ardors of the contemplative mind. As the hind penetrates the wood's dark avenues, so does the contemplative spirit penetrate the obscure meanings of things. And finally we

have God's own words: "Whoever offers praise, his sacrifice honors me."

7. Now if praise is unseemly in a sinner's mouth, do you not see how entirely necessary is the virtue of continence, if you are not to let sin reign in your mortal bodies? Nevertheless, continence will gain you no credit before God if you flaunt it for the praises of men. Consequently there is the greatest need too for that uprightness of intention by which you will both strive to please God alone and find the strength to adhere to him. This adherence to God is nothing less than that vision of God granted as a unique favor only to the pure in heart. That David had this clean heart is evident from his words: "My soul clings close to you"; and again: "My joy lies in being close to God." His vision of God brought him close to God, his closeness assured the vision. The man who lives in this state habitually will have the angels for his frequent and familiar guests, especially if they frequently find him in prayer. How I desire, O benign princes, that through you my requests may be made known to God! I do not refer here to God's normal knowledge, for the very thought of man is known to him, but rather that they be apprehended in the actual presence of God, by those who abide with God, both the holy angels and the glorified souls of men. Who will raise me up, in my poverty, from the dust, in my indigence from the dunghill, that I may share a place with the princes and be assigned a seat of honor? I am convinced that they will welcome with joy into their mansions him whom it pleased them to visit on the dunghill. Is it possible that we should be snubbed in heaven by those whom our conversion here below made so happy?

8. I think, therefore, that it was to these members of the household and her companions, that the bride addressed her request, to these she revealed her heart's desire when she said: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." See the familiar and friendly communication there is between the aspiring soul who is still in the flesh and those powerful heavenly spirits. Her desire is to be kissed, she asks for what she desires; but she doesn't call her lover by name, she is certain that they know him because he has been so often the subject of her conversation with them. Accordingly she does not say: "Let this one or that one kiss me;" but simply: "let him Kiss me." This was the way Mary Magdalen behaved; she did not mention the name of the person she sought when she spoke to the man whom she took to be the gardener: "Sir, if you have taken him away ...." Who is this "him"? She names no name, she takes for granted that what her own heart could not forget, even for a moment, must be plain to all. And so the bride's words to the Bridegroom's companions imply that they know her

secret, that her inward state is manifest to them, and no name passes her lips in that impulsive pleading about her beloved: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." Today I shall speak no more to you about this kiss, I shall detain you no longer, but tomorrow you will hear from me whatever your prayers may win from him whose anointing teaches about all things. For flesh and blood do not reveal such a secret, but only he who searches the depths of God, the Holy Spirit who, proceeding from the Father and the Son, lives and reigns equally with them for ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 8 THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE KISS OF THE MOUTH**

As I promised yesterday, and as you well remember, today we are to speak of the supreme kiss, that of the mouth. You must listen with more than usual attention to a theme that is sweet to the spirit above all others, that is so rare an experience and more difficult to understand. I think I should begin by considering the higher truths, and it seems to me that a kiss past comprehension, beyond the experience of any mere creature, was designated by him who said: "No one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." For the Father loves the Son whom he embraces with a love that is unique; he who is infinite embraces his equal, who is eternal, his co-eternal the sole God, his only-begotten. But the Son's bond with him is not less affectionate, for it led him even to death, as he himself testifies: "That all might know that I love the Father, rise, let us go." And he went forth, as we know, to his passion. Now, that mutual knowledge and love between him who begets and him who is begotten -- what can it comprise if not a kiss that is utterly sweet, but utterly a mystery as well?

2. For my part I am convinced that no creature, not even an angel, is permitted to comprehend this secret of divine love, so holy and so august. Does not Paul proclaim from his own experience that this is a peace which passes all understanding, even that of the angels? And hence the bride, although otherwise so audacious, does not dare to say: "Let him kiss me with his mouth," for she knows that this is the prerogative of the Father alone. What she does ask for is something less: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." Do you wish to see the newly-chosen bride receiving this unprecedented kiss, given not by the mouth but by the kiss of the mouth? Then look at Jesus in the presence of his



Apostles: "He breathed on them," according to St John, "and he said: `Receive the Holy Spirit.' " That favor, given to the newly-chosen Church, was indeed a kiss. That? you say. That corporeal breathing? O no, but rather the invisible Spirit, who is so bestowed in that breath of the Lord that he is understood to proceed from him equally as from the Father, truly the kiss that is common both to him who kisses and to him who is kissed. Hence the bride is satisfied to receive the kiss of the Bridegroom, though she be not kissed with his mouth. For her it is no mean or contemptible thing to be kissed by the kiss, because it is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit. If, as is properly understood, the Father is he who kisses, the Son he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity.

3. He it is then who inspires the daring spirit of the bride, he it is whom she trustingly petitions to come to her under the guise of a kiss. But this boldness in her request is justified by something that she knows. For when the Son said: "No one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son," he added: "and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." But the bride has no doubt that if he will reveal himself to anybody, it will be to her. Therefore, she dares to ask for this kiss, actually for that Spirit in whom both the Father and the Son will reveal themselves to her. For it is not possible that one of these could be known without the other. That is why Christ said: "To have seen me is to have seen the Father;" and John in his turn: "No one who has the Father can deny the Son, and to acknowledge the Son is to have the Father as well." From these declarations it is clearly evident that the Father cannot be known apart from the Son, nor the Son apart from the Father. Rightly therefore did Christ point out that one achieves supreme happiness not by knowing any one of them, but by knowing both, when he said: "Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." As a consequence, those who follow the Lamb are said to have his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads," which is to be glorified by this twofold knowledge.

4. But one of you may interpose and say: "Therefore knowledge of the Holy Spirit is not necessary, because when he said eternal life consisted of the knowledge of the Father and Son, he did not mention the Holy Spirit." True enough; but where there is perfect knowledge of the Father and the Son, how can there be ignorance of the goodness of both; which is the Holy Spirit? For no man has a complete knowledge of another until he finds out whether his will be good or evil.

So, although it has been said: "Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent," still, if that act of mission demonstrates the good pleasure both of the Father lovingly sending his Son and of the Son freely obeying the Father, then the Holy Spirit is not passed over in complete silence, for he is implied in the mention of so immense a grace. The Holy Spirit indeed is nothing else but the love and the benign goodness of them both.

5. When the bride asks for the kiss therefore, she asks to be filled with the grace of this threefold knowledge, filled to the utmost capacity of mortal flesh. But it is the Son whom she approaches, since it is by him it is to be revealed, and to whom he wills. He reveals himself therefore, and the Father as well, to whom it pleases him. And it is certain that he makes this revelation through the kiss, that is, through the Holy Spirit, a fact to which St Paul bears witness: "These are the very things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit." It is by giving the Spirit, through whom he reveals, that he shows us himself; he reveals in the gift, his gift is in the revealing. Furthermore, this revelation which is made through the Holy Spirit, not only conveys the light of knowledge but also lights the fire of love, as St Paul again testifies: "The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us."

And that is perhaps the reason why, in the case of those who, knowing God, yet refused to honor him as God, we do not read that they knew by a revelation of the Holy Spirit; for even though they possessed knowledge they did not love. As St Paul states: "God has shown himself to them," but he does not add: "through the Holy Spirit," lest those impious minds should usurp to themselves the kiss of the bride. They were content with the knowledge that gives self-importance, but ignorant of the love that makes the building grow. The apostle actually tells us the means by which they knew; they perceived him in the things that he had made. From all this it is clear that even their knowledge was not perfect, because they did not love. For if their knowledge had been complete, they would not have been blind to that goodness by which he willed to be born a human being, and to die for their sins. Just listen to what was revealed about God to them: "his everlasting power and deity," says St Paul. As you see, they in their presumption of spirit -- their own spirit, not God's -- studied his attributes of sublimity and majesty. That he was gentle and humble in heart they failed to understand. Nor must we be surprised at this, because we read of their leader, Behemoth, that he beholds everything that is high, nothing that is humble. On the contrary David did not walk among great things nor in wonders above himself; he would not be a

searcher of majesty lest he be overwhelmed by glory.

6. You too, if you would make prudent progress in your studies of the mysteries of the faith, would do well to remember the Wise Man's advice: "Do not try to understand things that are too difficult for you, or try to discover what is beyond your powers." These are occasions when you must walk by the Spirit and not according to your personal opinions, for the Spirit teaches not by sharpening curiosity but by inspiring charity. And hence the bride, when seeking him whom her heart loves, quite properly does not put her trust in mere human prudence, nor yield to the inane conceits of human curiosity. She asks rather for a kiss, that is she calls upon the Holy Spirit by whom she is simultaneously awarded with the choice repast of knowledge and the seasoning of grace. How true it is that the knowledge imparted in the kiss is lovingly received, since the kiss is love's own token. But knowledge which leads to self-importance, since it is devoid of love, cannot be the fruit of the kiss. Even those who have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, may not for any reason lay claim to that kiss. For the favor of the kiss bears with it a twofold gift, the light of knowledge and the fervor of devotion. He is in truth the Spirit of wisdom and insight, who, like the bee carrying its burden of wax and honey, is fully equipped with the power both of kindling the light of knowledge and infusing the delicious nurture of grace. Two kinds of people therefore may not consider themselves to have been gifted with the kiss, those who know the truth without loving it, and those who love it without understanding it; from which we conclude that this kiss leaves room neither for ignorance nor for lukewarmness.

So therefore, let the bride about to receive the twofold grace of this most holy kiss set her two lips in readiness, her reason for the gift of insight, her will for that of wisdom, so that overflowing with joy in the fullness of this kiss, she may be privileged to hear the words: "Your lips are moist with grace, for God has blessed you forever."

Thus the Father, when he kisses the Son, pours into him the plenitude of the mysteries of his divine being, breathing forth love's deep delight, as symbolized in the words of the psalm: "Day to day pours forth speech." As has already been stated, no creature whatsoever has been privileged to comprehend the secret of this eternal, blessed and unique embrace; the Holy Spirit alone is the sole witness and confidant of their mutual knowledge and love. For who could ever know the mind of the Lord, or who could be his counselor?

7. But I feel that one of you may now want to say: "What voice thundered forth to you a secret that, you insist, was made known to no creature?" Unhesitatingly I answer: "It is the only Son, who is in the Father's bosom who has made it known." But he has made it known, I will say, not to the sorry and unworthy creature that I am, but to John, the Bridegroom's friend, whose words these are; and not only to him but to John the Evangelist also, the disciple Jesus loved. For his soul was pleasing to the Lord, entirely worthy both of the name and the dowry of a bride, worthy of the Bridegroom's embraces, worthy that is, of leaning back on Jesus' breast. John imbibed from the heart of the only-begotten Son what he in turn had imbibed from the Father. Nor is John the only one, it is true also of all to whom the Angel of the Great Counsel said: "I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father." Paul drank of it, because the Good News he preached is not a human message nor did he receive it through men, it is something he learned only through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

All of these indeed could say with felicity and truth: "It is the only Son who is in the Father's bosom who has made it known to us." And this revelation -- what can you call it but a kiss? But it was the kiss of the kiss, not of the mouth. Listen if you will know what the kiss of the mouth is: "The Father and I are one;" and again: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." This is a kiss from mouth to mouth, beyond the claim of any creature. It is a kiss of love and of peace, but of the love which is beyond all knowledge and that peace which is so much greater than we can understand. The truth is that the things that no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, were revealed to Paul by God through his Spirit, that is, through him who is the kiss of his mouth. That the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son signifies the kiss of the mouth. But the kiss of the kiss we discover when we read: "Instead of the spirit of the world, we have received the Spirit that comes from God, to teach us to understand the gifts that he has given us."

8. But we must make a clearer distinction between the two. He who received the fullness is given the kiss of the mouth, but he who received from the fullness is given the kiss of the kiss. Paul was certainly a great man, but no matter how high he should aim in making the offer of his mouth, even if he were to raise himself right into the third heaven," he would still of necessity find himself remote from the lips of the Most High. He must abide content within the limits of

his capacity, and since he cannot of himself reach that glorious countenance, let him humbly ask that it may lean down to him, that, the kiss be transmitted from on high. He however who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, since he could dare to say: "The Father and I are one," because he was joined to him as an equal and embraced him as an equal -- he does not beg for a kiss from an inferior position; rather on equally sublime heights mouth is joined to mouth, and by a prerogative that is unique he receives the kiss from the mouth. For Christ therefore, the kiss meant a totality, for Paul only a participation; Christ rejoiced in the kiss of the mouth, Paul only in that he was kissed by the kiss.

9. Felicitous, however, is this kiss of participation that enables us not only to know God but to love the Father, who is never fully known until he is perfectly loved. Are there not surely some among you who at certain times perceive deep within their hearts the Spirit of the Son exclaiming: "Abba, Father"? Let that man who feels that he is moved by the same Spirit as the Son, let him know that he too is loved by the Father. Whoever he be let him be of good heart, let his confidence never waver. Living in the Spirit of the Son, let such a soul recognize herself as a daughter of the Father, a bride or even a sister of the Son, for you will find that the soul who enjoys this privilege is called by either of these names. Nor will it cost me much to prove it, the proof is ready to hand. They are the names by which the Bridegroom addresses her: "I come into my garden, my sister, my bride." She is his sister because they have the one Father; his bride because joined in the one Spirit. For if marriage according to the flesh constitutes two in one body, why should not a spiritual union be even more efficacious in joining two in one spirit? And hence anyone who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. But we have witness too from the Father, how lovingly and how courteously he gives her the name of daughter, and nevertheless invites her as his daughter-in-law to the sweet caresses of his Son: "Listen, daughter, pay careful attention: forget your nation and your ancestral home, then the king will fall in love with your beauty." See then from whom this bride demands a kiss. O soul called to holiness, make sure that your attitude is respectful, for he is the Lord your God, who perhaps ought not to be kissed, but rather adored with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 9 ON THE BREASTS OF THE BRIDE AND THE BRIDEGROOM**

It is time now for us to return to the book and attempt an explanation of the words of the bride and their consequence. For there they are, swinging precipitately out of nowhere, suspended before us. But we must see if there is something antecedent to them to which we may suitably connect them up. Let us suppose therefore that those whom we have called the friends of the Bridegroom now again approach the bride as they did yesterday and the day before. They find her in a state of weariness, bemoaning her condition; and wondering what the cause may be they begin to question her: "What has happened? Why this unusual sadness? Why do you murmur in this strange fashion? Is it not true that, estranged from your lawful husband, you turned aside with your lovers until, after they had abused you shamefully, you were finally compelled to return to your first husband? Did you not entreat him with tears and endless petitions to be allowed at least to touch his feet?" "I remember," she said. "What then?" said they. "After receiving that favor, and even the pardon of your offences in the kissing of the feet, you became restless again. Instead of being satisfied with a mercy so wonderful, you became eager for greater familiarity; with renewed insistence you demanded and obtained the second grace, the kiss of the hand with its endowment of virtues both many and great." "I do not deny it," she replied. But they went on: "And are you not the one who so often swore and protested that if you were ever favored with the kiss of the hand you would count that enough, you would ask for nothing further?" "Quite so," she said again. So what is it then?" they continued. "Is it that you grieve because some of those gifts you received have been taken away again?" "No," she replied, "nothing of the kind." "Do you fear then that you will be condemned anew for the sins of your past life, that you presumed were forgiven?" "No," was her answer.

2. "But please," they said, "do tell us what it is, then we can supply what you need."

"I cannot rest," she said, "unless he kisses me with the kiss of his mouth. I thank him for the kiss of the feet, I thank him too for the kiss of the hand; but if he has genuine regard for me, let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. There is no question of ingratitude on my part, it is simply that I am in love. The favors I have received are far above what I deserve, but they are less than what I long for. It is desire that drives me on, not reason. Please do not accuse me of presumption if I yield to this impulse of love. My shame indeed rebukes me, but love is stronger than all. I am well aware that he is a king who loves justice; but headlong love does not wait for judgment, is not chastened by advice, not shackled by shame

nor subdued by reason. I ask, I crave, I implore; let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. Don't you see that by his grace I have been for many years now careful to lead a chaste and sober life, I concentrate on spiritual studies, resist vices, pray often; I am watchful against temptations, I recount all my years in the bitterness of my soul. As far as I can judge I have lived among the brethren without quarrels. I have been submissive to authority, responding to the beck and call of my superior. I do not covet foods not mine; rather do I put both myself and my goods at the service of others. With sweat on my brow I eat my bread. Yet in all these practices there is evidence only of my fidelity, nothing of enjoyment. What can I be but, in the words of the Prophet, another Ephraim, a well-trained heifer that loves to tread the threshing floor? On top of that the Gospel says that he who does no more than his duty is looked on as a useless servant. I obey the commandments, to the best of my ability I hope, but in doing so my soul thirsts like a parched land. If therefore he is to find my holocaust acceptable, let him kiss me, I entreat, with the kiss of his mouth."

3. Many of you too, as I recall, are accustomed to complain to me in our private conversations about a similar languor and dryness of soul, an ineptitude and dullness of mind devoid of the power to penetrate the profound and subtle truths of God; devoid too, entirely or for the most part, of the sweetness of the spirit. What of these, except that they yearn to be kissed? That they yearn is indeed evident, their very mouths are open to inhale the spirit of wisdom and insight: insight that they may attain to what they long for, wisdom in order to savor what the mind apprehends. I think that a motive such as this must have inspired the holy Prophet's prayer when he said: "My soul will feast most richly, on my lips a song of joy and in my mouth, praise." The kiss was surely what he sought for, that kiss at whose touch the lips are so bedewed with the richness of spiritual grace, that only the Prophet's words again, spoken in another context, can fathom the effect: "My mouth is full of your praises, that I might sing of your glory, of your splendor all day long." No sooner had he tasted than he burst forth: "Lord how great your goodness, reserved for those who fear you!" This kiss has sufficiently detained us now. And yet, if I am to speak the truth, I cannot feel assured that my exposition measures up to the dignity of the subject. But let us pass on to other themes, experience of the kiss tells more than any words.

4. The text continues: "For your breasts are better than wine, smelling sweet of the best ointments." The author does not say who spoke these words, so we are free to assign them to the person whom we think they best suit. For my part, I

can see reasons for attributing them either to the bride, or to the Bridegroom or to the latter's companions. And for a start I shall point out how fittingly the bride might have spoken them. Let us say that while she and those companions are conversing together, the Bridegroom on whom the conversation centers, suddenly appears, for he loves to draw near to those who speak about him. It is his way. For example he proved himself a pleasant and affable companion to the two men who conversed together as they went to Emmaus. This is no more than what he has promised in the Gospel: "Where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them;" and through the Prophet: "Long before they call I shall answer; before they stop speaking I shall say: 'I am here.' " And so in the present instance he approaches though not actually invited; their words so please him that he anticipates their invitation: I am sure that sometimes he does not wait for words, our thoughts alone are enough to summon him. Did not a man after God's own heart say: "The Lord has heard the desire of the poor: your ear has heard the preparation of their heart." In every place you must be attentive to your inward state, you must realize that the God who is the assessor of mind and heart knows everything about you; he it is who moulds every heart and takes thought of all men do. The bride therefore, becoming conscious of the Bridegroom's presence, grew suddenly silent. She is ashamed to think that he is aware of her presumption, for a certain modesty had prompted her to use intermediaries in achieving her purpose. So in her endeavor to excuse her temerity, she turns to him and says: "For your breasts are better than wine, smelling sweet of the best ointments." What she meant was: "If I seem to be high-minded, O my Bridegroom, you are responsible; you have honored me so greatly with the nurturing sweetness of your breasts, that by your love and not by my own temerity I have put aside all fear, and may seem to have been more daring than is proper. I do indeed make bold, but it is because I am convinced of your goodness, forgetful of your majesty." These explanations have been given merely to supply a context for the words of the bride.

5. Now let us try to see the meaning of this commendation of the Bridegroom's breasts.

These two breasts are two proofs of his native kindness: his patience in awaiting the sinner and his welcoming mercy for the penitent. This twofold sweetness of inward joy overflows from the heart of the Lord Jesus in the form of tireless expectancy and prompt forgiveness. And be assured that this is no figment of mine. You yourselves have read of his patience: "Are you abusing his abundant



goodness, patience and toleration, not realizing that this goodness of God is meant to lead you to repentance?" To this very end he postpones his punishment of the contumacious, awaiting a favorable moment to bestow on them the grace of repentance and forgiveness. He does not wish the death of a wicked man, but that he turn back and live. And now let us see an example of the second breast, which I have called promptness to forgive. Of this you have read: "At whatever hour the sinner will repent, his sin will be forgiven him." Or again: "Let the wicked man abandon his way, the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn back to the Lord who will take pity on him, to our God who is rich in forgiving." David beautifully described both breasts in the few words: "Slow to anger, most loving." It is through her experience of this twofold goodness therefore, that the bride justifies the increase of confidence that emboldened her to ask for the kiss. She would seem to say to the Bridegroom: "What wonder if I presume to ask you for this favor, since your breasts have given me such overwhelming joy. It is your breasts' very sweetness, not trust in my own merits, that provokes me to this daring."

6. When she said, then, "your breasts are better than wine," she meant: "The richness of the grace that flows from your breasts contributes far more to my spiritual progress than the biting reprimands of superiors. Not only are they better than wine, but smelling sweet of the best ointments too, for not merely do you refresh those present with the milk of inward sweetness, you also spray the pleasing perfume of good repute over the absent ones, and so are well thought of, both by outsiders and by those within. You have, as I say, milk within and ointments without, for none would come to be refreshed with the milk, if you had not the perfume to attract them." We shall see later on what these ointments contain that make them worth considering, when we discuss the text: "We will run after you to the odor of your ointments."

Now, however, we must fulfill our promise and show if those words which we have attributed to the bride may not also be suitably assigned to the Bridegroom.

7. While the bride is conversing about the Bridegroom, he, as I have said, suddenly appears, yields to her desire by giving her a kiss, and so brings to fulfillment those words of the psalm: "You have granted him his heart's desire, not denied him what his lips entreated." The filling up of her breasts is a proof of this. For so great is the potency of that holy kiss, that no sooner has the bride received it than she conceives and her breasts grow rounded with the fruitfulness

of conception; bearing witness, as it were, with this milky abundance. Men with an urge to frequent prayer will have experience of what I say. Often enough when we approach the altar to pray our hearts are dry and lukewarm. But if we persevere, there comes an unexpected infusion of grace, our breast expands as it were, and our interior is filled with an overflowing love; and if somebody should press upon it then, this milk of sweet fecundity would gush forth in streaming richness. Let us hear the Bridegroom "You have received, my love, what you asked for, and here is a sign to show you, your breasts are better than wine; henceforth you will know that you have received the kiss because you will be conscious of having conceived. That explains the expansion of your breasts, filled with a milky richness far surpassing the wine of the worldly knowledge that can intoxicate indeed but with curiosity, not charity; it fills but does not nourish; puffs up but does not build up; pampers but does not strengthen."

8. Finally, let us imagine those words as coming from the Bridegroom's companions: "You are unjust," they say, "to murmur against the Bridegroom, because what he has already given you is of far more value than that which you look for. The favor you demand is rather for your own delight, but the breasts with which you may feed the offspring of your womb are preferable to, that is, they are more essential than, the wine of contemplation. What gladdens the heart of one man cannot be placed on equal terms with that which benefits many. Rachel may be more beautiful, but Lia is more fruitful. So beware of lingering amid the kisses of contemplation, better the breasts that flow in the preaching of God's word."

9. There is still another meaning that I did not really intend to place before you, but I must not exclude it. Why should we not allow that these words may be fittingly applied to those that are cared for by a mother or a nurse, as children are? For these souls, immature, lacking in hardihood, cannot tolerate patiently the contemplative repose of her to whom they look for fuller instruction in the faith, for the guidance of her religious observances. And is it not the restlessness of such as these that is frowned upon in a subsequent verse, where they are forbidden with a grave warning to awake the loved one till she pleases? When these perceive that the bride longs for kisses, that she seeks to be alone, that she shuns the streets, turns aside from the crowds and prefers her own peace to solicitude for them, they protest: "No!" they say. "No! Far greater the profit in the breasts you extend to others than in the embraces you enjoy in private. For by the former you deliver us from the selfish passions that attack the soul; you snatch us from the world and gain us for God." What they are really saying is:

"Your breasts are better than wine." "These spiritual delights," they say, "that your breasts distill can conquer in us the pleasures of the flesh, that enslaved us just as drunkards are enslaved by wine."

10. This comparison of carnal pleasures with wine is so very apt. For the grape, once pressed, can never again exude its liquid, it is condemned to endless dryness. So too the flesh, caught in the winepress of death, is completely drained of its co-natural pleasures, never again to revive to the stirring of sensual passions. Therefore the Prophet cried out: "All flesh is grass and its beauty like the wild flower's. The grass withers, the flower fades." St Paul too bears witness: "If a man sows in the field of self-indulgence, he will get a harvest of corruption out of it. Food is only meant for the stomach and the stomach for food; yes, and God is going to do away with both of them." But this analogy may be applied to the world as well as to the flesh; for the world with all it craves for, is coming to an end. Everything in the world indeed will come to an end, an end from which there is no return. Not so, however, the breasts we have spoken of. For when these have been drained dry they are replenished again from the maternal fount within, and offered to all who will drink. Here is a further reason why I insist that the breasts of the bride are superior to worldly or carnal love; the numbers who drink of them, however great, cannot exhaust their content; their flow is never suspended, for they draw unceasingly from the inward fountains of charity. Out of her heart shall flow rivers of water, there will be a spring inside her, welling up to eternal life. The accumulating praises of the breasts come to a climax in the perfume of the ointments, because they not only feed us with the choice food of doctrine, but shed around them like a pleasing aroma the repute of good deeds. All else that these breasts may signify, what milk fills them, what be the ambient perfumes of her ointments these I shall treat of later with the help of Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 10 THE BREASTS AND THEIR PERFUMES**

I do not pretend that, left to myself, I can make any new discovery, for the reason that I lack sufficient depth of understanding and powers of penetration. But the mouth of Paul is a mighty and unfailing fountain, ever open to us all; and as I have often done before, so now too I draw from its resources in my attempt to interpret the breasts of the bride. "Rejoice," he said, "with those who rejoice, and be sad with those who sorrow." In these few words we find the description of a

mother's affections, because she shares both health and sickness with her children. She cannot avoid being conformed to them in the depths of her being in these experiences. Therefore, following Paul's guidance, I shall assign these two affective movements to the bride's two breasts, compassion to one, joyful sympathy to the other. For if she were not prompt to rejoice with those who rejoice, and ready to be sad with those who sorrow, her breasts would still be undeveloped; she would be no more than a girl too immature to marry. Should a person devoid of these affective qualities be confided with the direction of souls, or the work of preaching, he will do no good to others and great harm to himself. How utterly shameful then, if he should intrude himself into these tasks!

2. But we must return to the subject of the bride's breasts, and see how the milk of one differs in kind from that of the other.

Joyful sympathy yields the milk of encouragement, compassion that of consolation, and as often as the spiritual mother receives the kiss, so often does she feel each species flowing richly from heaven into her loving heart. And you may see her unhesitatingly nourishing her little ones with the milk of these full breasts, from one the milk of consolation, from the other that of encouragement, according to the need of each. For example, if she should notice that one of those whom she begot by preaching the Good News is assailed by temptation, that he becomes emotionally disturbed, is reduced to sadness and pusillanimity and therefore no longer capable of enduring the force of the temptation, will she not condole with him, caress him, weep with him, comfort him, and bring forward every possible evidence of God's love in order to raise him from his desolate state? If, on the contrary, she discovers that he is eager, active, progressive, her joy abounds, she plies him with encouraging advice, fans the fire of his zeal, imparts the ways of perseverance, and inspires him to ever higher ideals. She becomes all things to all, mirrors in herself the emotions of all and so shows herself to be a mother to those who fail no less than to those who succeed.

3. And if I may speak of those who have undertaken the direction of souls, how many there are today who reveal their lack of the requisite qualities! Only with a feeling of pain can I speak of this subject at all - - how they melt down in the furnace of their covetousness the insults endured by Christ, the spittle, the scourging, the nails, the lance, the cross, his death itself, and squander them in the pursuit of shameful gain. The very price of the world's redemption is bundled into their purses; and only in this do they differ from Judas Iscariot, that he

reckoned the total value of these things at a paltry sum of money, while they, with a more ravening greed, demand riches beyond counting. They display an insatiable passion for gains that they constantly fear to lose, and bewail after they have lost. In this love of money they find their rest, provided they are ever free from the anxiety of securing, or even further increasing, what they have acquired. Neither the peril of souls nor their salvation gives them any concern. They are certainly devoid of the maternal instinct. Grown fat, gross, bloated to excess on the heritage of the crucified Christ, "about the ruin of Joseph they do not care at all." There is no pretense about a true mother, the breasts that she displays are full for the taking. She knows how to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to be sad with those who sorrow, pressing the milk of encouragement without intermission from the breast of joyful sympathy, the milk of consolation from the breast of compassion. And with that I think we may desist from further discussion on the breasts of the bride and the milk that fills them.

4. Now I shall try to explain the nature of the ointments of which the breasts are redolent, and so I ask the aid of your prayers that I may benefit my hearers by a worthy expression of the thoughts that inspire me. Just as the breasts of the Bridegroom differ from those of the bride, so do the ointments with which they are perfumed. In the previous sermon I have indicated the place in which I hope to speak of the Bridegroom's breasts. Here we must concentrate on the ointments of the bride with an attention worthy of the scriptural eulogy that commends them not merely as good but as the best. I mention several kinds of ointments, so that given a choice, we may select the ones that seem especially appropriate to the breasts of the bride. There is the ointment of contrition, that of devotion and that of piety. The first is pungent, causing some pain; the second mitigates and soothes pain; the third heals the wound and rids the patient of the illness. And now let us discuss each of these more extensively.

5. A soul entangled in many sins can prepare for itself a certain ointment once it begins to reflect on its behavior, and collects its many and manifold sins, hems them together and crushes them in the mortar of its conscience. It cooks them, as it were, within a breast that boils up like a pot over the fire of repentance and sorrow, so that it can exclaim with the Prophet: "My heart became hot within me. As I mused the fire burned." Here then is one ointment which the sinful soul should provide at the beginning of its conversion and apply to its still smarting wounds, for the first sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit. And even

though the sinner be poor and in want, devoid of the means to compound a better and more precious ointment, let him make sure in the meantime to prepare at least this one, no matter how degenerate the materials, because God will not scorn this crushed and broken heart. The more despicable he believes his offering to be because of his consciousness of sin, the more acceptable it will appear to God.

6. However, if we say that this invisible and spiritual ointment was symbolized by the visible ointment with which the sinful woman, as the Gospel describes, visibly anointed the corporeal feet of God, we cannot regard it as entirely worthless. For what do we read in the Gospel? "The house," it says, "was full of the scent of the ointment." It trickled from the hands of a courtesan, pouring over the feet, the body's extremities; and yet it was not so paltry, not so contemptible, as to prevent the house's being filled with the power of its aroma, the sweetness of its scent. So if we consider how great the fragrance with which the Church is perfumed in the conversion of one sinner, what a sweet smell of life leading to life each penitent can become! Provided that his repentance is wholehearted and visible to all, may we not with equal assurance say of him: "The house was full of the scent of the ointment." We can even say that this perfume of repentance reaches to the very abodes of the blessed in heaven because we have the witness of Truth itself that there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner. Rejoice then, you penitents; do not be afraid, you fainthearted ones. I am speaking to those of you who have recently come to us from the world, who have renounced your sinful ways and are inevitably gripped by the bitterness and confusion of the repentant soul that, like the pain of fresh wounds, torment and distract beyond bearing. Safely may your hands drip with the bitterness of myrrh in the course of this salutary anointing, because God will not scorn this crushed and broken spirit. This kind of anointing, that not only inspires men to amend their lives but even makes the angels dance for joy, must not be easily spurned nor cheaply priced.

7. But there is another ointment, more precious still, compounded of far superior elements. To obtain the elements of the former we do not have to travel far, we find them to hand without any trouble, and may cull them from our little gardens as often as necessity demands. For does not every man know, unless he deceives himself, that he has it within the power of his will to commit manifold sins and iniquities? But these, as you recognize, are the elements of the ointment we have just described." The spices of this second ointment, on the contrary, are

not produced on our earth at all, we seek to gain them for ourselves from afar. I mean that all that is good, everything that is perfect, is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light. For this ointment is made from the gifts of God bestowed on the human race. Happy the man who makes it his business to gather these carefully for himself and keep them in mind with due thanksgiving. When they shall have been pounded and refined in the heart's receptacle with the pestle of frequent meditation, all of them fused together in the fire of holy desire, and finally enriched with the oil of gladness, you will have an ointment more excellent than the former, and far more precious. Enough proof can be found in the words of him who said: "Whoever makes thanksgiving his sacrifice honors me." No one doubts that the recalling of favors is an incentive to praise.

8. Furthermore, since the only thing that Scripture says of the former ointment is that God does not despise it, it follows that the second one, which especially glorifies him, is the more highly commended. Therefore the former is applied to the feet, the latter to the head. St Paul says: "God is the head of Christ," so in speaking of Christ we may understand the head as referring to his divinity, and it is beyond doubt that he who offers thanks anoints the head, because he makes contact with God, not man. I do not mean that he who is God is not also man, for the one Christ is both God and man; I mean that all things which are good, even those of which man is the agent; really come from God rather than man. "It is the spirit," we are told, "that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer." Hence there is a curse on the man who puts his trust in man, for although our whole hope rightly depends on God made man, it is not because he is man but because he is God. Therefore the first ointment is applied to the feet, the second to the head, because the humiliation of a broken heart fittingly corresponds to the lowliness of the flesh, and honor is owed to majesty. See then what an ointment I have been describing for you, with which he before whom even the Principalities stand in awe, does not disdain to be anointed on the head. Rather does he regard it as a matter of signal honor, for he says: "Whoever makes thanksgiving his sacrifice honors me."

9. From all this we may conclude that the poor, the needy and the pusillanimous cannot prepare an ointment of this kind. Confidence alone can lay hold of its spices and ingredients, a confidence that is itself the fruit of liberty of spirit and purity of heart. The mind that is lacking in courage and of little faith, that is fettered by the scantiness of its own resources, is, through sheer indigence,

deprived of the leisure that might be occupied with the praises of God or with that contemplation of his beneficence out of which praise is born. And if it does at times make a genuine attempt to scale the heights, almost at once it is pulled back to its native state by the pressing demands of domestic needs, and so by its very destitution it is forcibly confined within its own narrow limits. If you ask of me the cause of this miserable state, I shall reveal something that, unless I be mistaken, you will recognize as either present now in yourselves, or as having once been present. The weakness and misgiving exhibited by this type of person seem to me usually to arise from either of two causes, from the fact that he has been but recently converted, or because he lives in a lukewarm fashion even though converted for long years. Both of these conditions humiliate, depress, and agitate the mind, since either because of its lukewarmness or because of the recentness it perceives the old passions of the soul to be still alive and it is forced to concentrate on cutting out from the garden of the heart the briars of sinful habits and the nettles of evil desires. Such a man cannot get away from himself. How else can it be? Can he who is worn out with groaning exult at the same time in the praises of God? Isaiah talks of thanksgiving and the sound of music. In what manner will it sound in the mouth of a man given over to groaning and lamenting. It is just as the Wise Man says: "A tale out of time is like music in mourning." And of course thanksgiving is made after receiving a favor, not before. But the soul that still languishes in sadness is not enjoying a favor, rather it needs one. It has a good reason for offering prayers of petition, but scarcely a reason for returning thanks. How can it rejoice in the memory of a favor not yet received? Quite rightly then did I say that the man whose resources are poor is not called upon to prepare this ointment, for this is the work of one who can draw on the memory of divine favors. He whose gaze is held by the darkness cannot see the light. Bitterness holds him in its grip, the unpleasant recollection of his sins preoccupies his memory to the exclusion of every joyful thought. It is to souls like this that the Prophet says: "It is vain for you to rise before light." He points out that it is useless for you to aspire to the contemplation of truths that give delight, until the sins that disquiet you have been blotted out in the light of consolation. This second ointment therefore is not a product of impoverished souls.

10. But let us take a look at those who may rightly boast of possessing an abundance of it. "They left the presence of the Sanhedrin glad to have had the honor of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name of Jesus." They whose gentleness remained unshaken in the face both of reproaches and blows, had



surely been filled from the overflowing richness of the Spirit. For they were rich in the charity that no amount of self-giving can exhaust; out of its resources they easily found what sufficed to offer up "fat holocausts." Those drenched hearts of theirs poured out at random a holy unction, with which they were more fully imbued, when they proclaimed in various languages, according as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech, the marvels of God. And surely we must believe that an abundance of these same ointments was lavished on those of whom St Paul says: "I never stop thanking God for all the graces you have received through Jesus Christ. I thank him that you have been enriched in so many ways, in all speech and in all knowledge; the witness to Christ has indeed been strong among you, so that you will not be without any of the gifts of the Spirit." How I wish that I were able to offer thanks for similar graces on your behalf, that I might see you men rich in virtue, prompt to sing God's praises, overflowing with an increasing wealth of this spiritual-anointing in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **SERMON 11 THANKSGIVING FOR CHRIST'S SAVING WORK**

I said at the end of my last sermon, and I have no hesitation in repeating it, that I long to see you all sharing in that holy anointing, that religious attitude in which the benefits of God are recalled with gladness and thanksgiving. This involves a twofold grace: it lightens the burdens of the present life, makes them more supportable for those who can give themselves with joy to the work of praising God; and nothing more appropriately represents on earth the state of life in the heavenly fatherland than spontaneity in this outpouring of praise. Scripture implies as much when it says: "Happy those who live in your house and can praise you all day long." It was with a special reference to this anointing that the Prophet exclaimed: "How good, how delightful it is for all to live together like brothers; fine as oil on the head." These words do not seem applicable to the first anointing. Though that is good in itself, it is not by any means pleasant; because the recollection of one's sins begets bitterness rather than pleasure. Nor do those involved in it live together, since each one bewails and mourns over his own particular sins. Those, however, who are employed in the work of thanksgiving are contemplating and thinking about God alone, and so they cannot help but dwell in unity. That which they do is good because they offer to God the glory that is most rightly his; and it is also pleasant, since of its very nature it gives delight.

2. And for that reason my advice to you, my friends, is to turn aside occasionally from troubled and anxious pondering on the paths you may be treading, and to travel on smoother ways where the gifts of God are serenely savored, so that the thought of him may give breathing space to you whose consciences are perplexed. I should like you to experience for yourselves the truth of the holy Prophet's words: "Make the Lord your joy and he will give you what your heart desires." Sorrow for sin is indeed necessary, but it should not be an endless preoccupation. You must dwell also on the glad remembrance of God's loving-kindness, otherwise sadness will harden the heart and lead it more deeply into despair. Let us mix honey with our absinthe, it is more easily drunk when sweetened, and what bitterness it may still retain will be wholesome. You must fix your attention on the ways of God, see how he mitigates the bitterness of the heart that is crushed, how he wins back the pusillanimous soul from the abyss of despair, how he consoles the grief-stricken and strengthens the wavering with the sweet caress of his faithful promise. By the mouth of the Prophet he declares: "For my praise I will bridle you, lest you should perish." By this he seems to say: "Lest you should be cast down by excessive sadness at the sight of your sins, and rush despairingly to perdition like an unbridled horse over a precipice, I shall rein you in, I shall curb you with my mercy and set you on your feet with my praises. Then you will breathe freely again in the enjoyment of my benefits, overwhelmed though you be by evils of your own making, because you will find that my kindness is greater than your culpability." If Cain had been curbed by this kind of bridle he would never have uttered that despairing cry: "My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon." God forbid! God forbid! His loving mercy is greater than all iniquity. Hence the just man is not always accusing himself, he does so only in the opening words of his intercourse with God; he will normally conclude that intercourse with the divine praises. You can see therefore that the order of the just man's progress is expressed in the words: "After reflecting on my behavior, I turn my feet to your decrees," that is, he who has endured grief and unhappiness in following his own ways can finally say: "In the way of your decrees lies my joy, a joy beyond all wealth." Therefore, if you are to follow the just man's example, if you are to form a humble opinion of yourselves, you must think of the Lord with goodness. So you are told in the Book of Wisdom: "Think of the Lord with goodness, seek him in simplicity of heart." You will all the more easily achieve this if you let your minds dwell frequently, even continually, on the memory of God's bountifulness. Otherwise, how will you fulfill St Paul's advice: "In all things give thanks to God," if your hearts will have lost sight of those things

for which thanks are due? I would not have you bear the reproach flung at the Jews of old, who, according to Scripture, "had forgotten his achievements, the marvels he had shown them."

3. We must admit though that it is impossible for any man to remember and recount all the benefits that the Lord, so merciful and tender-hearted, ceaselessly bestows on mortal men, for who can recount the Lord's triumphs, who can praise him enough? Yet one at least of his benefits, the work by which he redeemed us, his chief and greatest achievement, should by no means be allowed to slip from the memory of the redeemed. Concerning this work I wish to suggest for your consideration two important points that now occur to me, which I shall state as briefly as possible in accord with the Wise Man's saying: "Give the wise man an opportunity, he grows wiser still." The two are these: manner and fruit. The manner involved the self-emptying of God, the fruit was that we should be filled with him. Meditation on the former is the seed-bed of holy hope, meditation on the latter an incentive to the highest love. Both of them are essential for our progress, because hope without love is the lot of the time-server, and love without reward grows cold.

4. I shall add, too, that the fruit we must expect as our love's fulfillment should be worthy of the promise of him whom we love. "A full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap." And that measure, as I have heard, will be without measure.

But what I should like to know, however, is the nature of that which is to be measured out, what that immense reward is which has been promised. "The eye has not seen, O God, besides you, what things you have prepared for them that love you." Tell us then, since you do the preparing, tell us what it is you prepare. We believe, we are confident, that in accordance with your promise, "we shall be filled with the good things of your house." But I persist in asking what are these good things, what are they like? Would it be with corn and wine and oil, with gold and silver or precious stones? But these are things that we have known and seen, that we have grown weary of seeing. We seek for the things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man. To search after these things, whatever they may be, is a source of pleasure and relish and delight. "They will all be taught by God, says Scripture, and he will be all in all. As I see it, the fullness that we hope for from God will be only something of God himself.

5. Who indeed can comprehend what an abundance of goodness is contained in that brief expression: "God will be all in all"? Not to speak of the body, I discern in the soul three faculties, the reason, the will, the memory, and these three may be said to be identified with the soul itself. Everyone who is "guided by the Spirit realizes how greatly in the present life these three are lacking in integrity and perfection. And what reason can there be for this, except that God is not yet "all in all"? Hence it comes about that the reason very often falters in its judgments, the will is agitated by a fourfold perturbation and the memory confused by its endless forgetfulness. Man, noble though he be, was unwillingly been subjected to this triple form of futility, but hope nonetheless was left to him. For he who satisfies with good the desire of the soul will one day himself be for the reason, fullness of light, for the will, the fullness of peace, for the memory, eternity's uninterrupted flow. O truth! O love! O eternity! Oh blessed and beatifying Trinity! To you the wretched trinity that I bear within me sends up its doleful yearnings because of the unhappiness of its exile. Departing from you, in what errors, what pains, what fears it has involved itself! Unhappy me! What a trinity we have won in exchange for you! "My heart is throbbing," and hence my pain; "my strength is deserting me" and hence my fear; "the light of my eyes itself has left me," and hence my error. O trinity of my soul, how utterly different the Trinity you have offended in your exile.

6. And still, why so downcast, my soul, why do you sigh within me? Put your hope in God. I shall praise him yet, when error will have gone from the reason, pain from the will, and every trace of fear from the memory. Then will come that state for which we hope, with its admirable serenity, its fullness of delight, its endless security. The God who is truth is the source of the first of these gifts; the God who is love, of the second; the God who is all-powerful, of the third. And so it will come to pass that God will be all in all, for the reason will receive unquenchable light, the will imperturbable peace, the memory an unfailing fountain from which it will draw eternally. I wonder if it seems right to you that we should assign that first operation to the Son, the second to the Holy Spirit, the last to the Father. In doing so, however, we must beware of excluding either the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit from any one of these communications, lest the distinction of Persons should diminish the divine fullness proper to each of them, or their perfection be so understood as to annul the personal properties. Consider too that the children of this world experience a corresponding threefold temptation from the allurements of the flesh, the glitter of life in the world, the

self-fulfillment patterned on Satan. These three include all the artifices by which the present life deceives its unhappy lovers, even as St John proclaimed: "All that is in the world is the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life." So much for the fruit of the redemption.

7. Now with regard to the manner, which if you remember, we defined as God's self-emptying, I venture to offer three important points for your consideration. For that emptying was neither a simple gesture nor a limited one; but he emptied himself even to the assuming of human nature, even to accepting death, death on a cross. Who is there that can adequately gauge the greatness of the humility, gentleness, self-surrender, revealed by the Lord of majesty in assuming human nature, in accepting the punishment of death, the shame of the cross? But somebody will say: "Surely the Creator could have restored his original plan without all that hardship?" Yes, he could, but he chose the way of personal suffering so that man would never again have a reason to display that worst and most hateful of all vices, ingratitude. If his decision did involve painful weariness for himself, it was meant also to involve man in a debt that only great love can pay. Where the ease with which man was created sapped his spirit of devotion, the hardship with which he was redeemed should urge him on to gratitude. For how did man the ingrate regard his creation? "I was created freely indeed but with no trouble or labor on my Creator's part; for at his command I was made, just like every other thing. What is big about that gift if not the great facility of the word that made it?" Thus does human impiety belittle the boon of creation, and turn that which of its nature is a source of love into an occasion for ingratitude. Those who live by these sentiments share the godlessness of evil-doers. But these lying mouths are silenced. For, more obvious than the light of day is the immense sacrifice he has made for you, O man; he who was Lord became a slave, he who was rich became a pauper, the Word was made flesh, and the Son of God did not disdain to become the son of man. So may it please you to remember that, even if made out of nothing, you have not been redeemed out of nothing. In six days he created all things, and among them, you. On the other hand, for a period of thirty whole years he worked your salvation in the midst of the earth. What endurance was his in those labors! To his bodily needs and the molestations of his enemies did he not add the mightier burden of the ignominy of the cross, and crown it all with the horror of his death? And this was indeed necessary. Man and beast you save, O Lord. How you have multiplied your mercy, O God.

8. Meditate on these things, turn them over continually in your minds. Refresh those hearts of yours with perfumes such as these, hearts writhing so long under the repugnant odor of your sins. May you abound with these ointments, as sweet as they are salutary. But yet, you must beware of thinking that you now possess those superior ones that are commended to us in the breasts of the bride. The necessity of bringing this sermon to an end does not allow me to begin discussing them now. But all that has been said about the others you must retain in your memory and reveal in your way of life; and do please help me with your prayers that I may worthily portray with appropriate sentiments those superior delights of the bride, that I may fill your own souls with the love of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **SERMON 12 THE GRACE OF LOVING-KINDNESS**

As I recall, I have been discussing two ointments with you: one of contrition, that takes account of numerous sins, the other of devotion, that embodies numerous benefits. Both are wholesome experiences but not both pleasant. The first one is known to carry a sting, because the bitter remembrance of sins incites compunction and causes pain, whereas the second is soothing, it brings consolation through a knowledge of God's goodness and so assuages pain. But there is another ointment, far excelling these two, to which I give the name loving-kindness, because the elements that go to its making are the needs of the poor, the anxieties of the oppressed, the worries of those who are sad, the sins of wrong-doers, and finally, the manifold misfortunes of people of all classes who endure affliction, even if they are our enemies. These elements may seem rather depressing, but the ointment made from them is more fragrant than all other spices. It bears the power to heal, for "Happy the merciful; they shall have merry shown them." A collection therefore of manifold miseries on which the eye rests with loving-kindness, represents the ingredients from which the best ointments are made, ointments that are worthy of the breasts of the bride and capable of winning the Bridegroom's attention. Happy the mind that has been wise enough to enrich and adorn itself with an assortment of spices such as these, pouring upon them the oil of mercy and warming them with the fire of charity! Who, in your opinion, is the good man who takes pity and lends, who is disposed to compassionate, quick to render assistance, who believes that there is more happiness in giving than in receiving, who easily forgives but is not easily

angered, who will never seek to be avenged, and will in all things take thought for his neighbor's needs as if they were his own? Whoever you may be, if your soul is thus disposed, if you are saturated with the dew of mercy, overflowing with affectionate kindness, making yourself all things to all men yet pricing your deeds like something discarded in order to be ever and everywhere ready to supply to others what they need, in a word, so dead to yourself that you live only for others -- if this be you, then you obviously and happily possess the third and best of all ointments and your hands have dripped with liquid myrrh that is utterly enchanting. It will not run dry in times of stress nor evaporate in the heat of persecution; but God will perpetually "remember all your oblations and find your holocaust acceptable."

2. There are men of riches in the city of the Lord of hosts. I wonder if some among them possess these ointments.

As invariably happens, the first to spring to my mind is that chosen vessel, St Paul, truly a vessel of myrrh and frankincense and every perfume the merchant knows. He was Christ's incense to God in every place. His heart was a fountain of sweet fragrance that radiated far and wide, seized as he was with an anxiety for all the churches. See what those ingredients were, those spices that he had accumulated for himself: "I face death every day," he said, "for your glory." And again: "Who was weak, and I was not weak with him? Who was scandalized, and I did not burn?" Many similar passages, well known to all of you, show how prolific this rich man was in compounding the best of ointments. It was so fitting that the breasts which, fed the members of Christ should be redolent of the finest and purest of spices; they were members to whom Paul was truly a mother, giving birth to them all over and over again, until Christ was formed in them, that the members might be renewed in the likeness of their head.

3. Another man too, rich in the possession of these choice materials from which he prepared ointments of superior quality, said: "No stranger ever had to sleep outside, my door was always open to the travelers;" and again: "I was eyes for the blind, and feet for the lame. Who but I was father of the Poor? I used to break the fangs of wicked men, and snatch their prey from between their jaws. Have I been insensible to poor men's needs, or let a widow's eyes grow dim? Or taken my share of bread alone, not giving a share to the orphan? Have I ever seen a wretch in need of clothing, or a beggar going naked, without his having cause to bless me from his heart, as he felt the warmth of the fleece from my lambs?"

What a sweet perfume that man must have radiated throughout the earth by works such as these? Every action bore its own aroma. Even his own conscience was filled with accumulating perfumes, so that pleasant odors from within tempered the stench of his rotting flesh.

4. Joseph, after he had drawn all the Egyptians to run after him to the odor of his ointments, ultimately proffered the same perfumed favor to the very men who had sold him. He began indeed by angrily reproaching them, but could not for long restrain the tears that burst forth from the fullness of his heart, tears that effaced the signs of anger and betrayed his love. Samuel mourned for Saul, the man who was intent on killing him; his heart grew warm with the fire of charity, his spirit melted within him, and love made him weep. And because his reputation was diffused abroad like a perfume, Scripture tells of him that "all Israel from Dan to Beersheba came to know that Samuel was accredited as a prophet of the Lord." What shall I say of Moses? With what a rich feast did he not fill his heart? Not even that rebellious house in which for a time he sojourned, could destroy by its rude anger the spiritual grace bestowed on him at the beginning of his career. His gentleness remained unshaken despite unremitting discords and conflicts day after day. Well did he deserve that testimony of the Holy Spirit that he was the humblest man on earth. For with them that hated peace he was peaceable since he not only curbed his anger in face of an ungrateful and rebellious people, but even appeased by his intervention the anger of God, as Scripture says "He talked of putting an end to them and would have done, if Moses his chosen had not stood in the breach, confronting him, deflecting his destructive anger." He even went so far as to say: "If it please you to forgive, forgive. But if not, then blot me out from the book that you have written." Surely a man truly filled with the grace of mercy! Clearly he speaks as a mother would for whom there is no delight or happiness that is not shared by her children. For instance, if a wealthy man should say to a poverty-stricken woman: "Come and join me at dinner, but better leave outside the child in your arms, his crying will only disturb us," do you think she would do it? Would she not rather choose to fast than to put away the child so dear to her and dine alone with the rich man? Hence Moses was resolved not to go alone to join in his Master's happiness while those people to whom he clung as a mother, with all a mother's affection despite their restlessness and ingratitude, remained outside. Inwardly he suffered, but he judged that suffering to be more tolerable than separation from them.



5. Who was more gentle than David who bewailed the death of the man who had ever thirsted for his own? What greater evidence of kindness could there be than his unhappiness at the demise of him into whose place he stepped as king? How hard it was to console him when his parricidal son was killed! Affection such as this certainly witnessed to an abundance of the best ointment. Therefore there is an assured ring in the words of that prayer: "O Lord, remember David and all his meekness." All these persons possessed the best ointments and even today diffuse their perfumes through all the churches. A similar influence is achieved by those too who, in the course of this life have been indulgent and charitable, who have made an effort to show kindness to their fellow-men, not vindicating to themselves alone any grace they were gifted with, but exercising it for the common good in the consciousness that they owe a duty to enemies no less than friends, to the wise just as much as to the unwise. Since their purpose was to be of help to everybody they evinced a great humility before all in all that they did, they were beloved by God and men, their good odor a perfume in the memory. Men like these, whatever their number, permeated their own times and today, too, with the best of ointments.

And you too, if you will permit us your companions to share in the gift you have received from above, if you are at all times courteous, friendly, agreeable, gentle and humble, you will find men everywhere bearing witness to the perfumed influence you radiate. Everyone among you who not only patiently endures the bodily and mental weaknesses of his neighbors, but, if permissible and possible, even plies them with attentions, inspires them with encouragement, helps them with advice, or, where the rules do not so permit, at least does not cease to assist them by fervent prayers -- everyone, I repeat, who performs such deeds among you, gives forth a good odor among the brethren like a rare and delicate perfume. As balsam in the mouth so is such a man in the community; people will point him out and say: "This is a man who loves his brothers and the people of Israel; this is a man who prays much for the people and for the holy city."

6. But let us turn to the Gospels to see if they contain any reference to these perfumes. "Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices with which to go and anoint Jesus." What were these ointments, so precious that they were bought and prepared for the body of Christ, so abundant that they sufficed to anoint every part of it? For nowhere do we find that the other two ointments were either bought or specially prepared for use on the body of Christ, or that they were spread over every part of it. There is a moment when we

are suddenly brought face to face with a woman who in one place kisses Christ's feet and covers them with a perfume, and in another either she or a different woman brings in an alabaster box of ointment and pours it on his head. But in this instance we are told: "They bought spices with which to go and anoint Jesus." They buy spices, not ointments; the ointment for his body was not bought ready made, a totally new one was prepared; and not for application merely to a part of his body such as the feet or the head, but -- as is indicated in the words: "to anoint Jesus" -- to cover his whole body, not any particular part.

7. You too, if you are to become deeply compassionate, must behave generously and kindly not only to parents and relatives, or those from whom you have received or hope to receive a good turn -- after all non-Christians do as much -- but, following Paul's advice, you must make the effort to do good to all. Inspired by this God-oriented purpose, you will never refuse to do an act of charity, whether spiritual or corporal, to an enemy, or withdraw it once offered. It will thus be clear that you abound with the best ointments, that you have undertaken to care not only for the head or feet of the Lord, but, as far as in you lies, for his whole body which is the Church. It was perhaps for this reason the Lord Jesus would not allow the mixture of spices to be used on his dead body, he wished to reserve it for his living body. For that Church which eats the living bread which has come down from heaven is alive: she is the more precious Body of Christ that was not to taste death's bitterness, whereas every Christian knows that his other body did suffer death. His will is that she be anointed, that she be cared for, that her sick members be restored to health with remedies that are the fruit of diligence. It was for her that he withheld these precious ointments, when, anticipating the hour and hastening the glory of his resurrection, he eluded the women's devout purpose only to give it new direction. Mercy and not contempt was the reason for this refusal; the service was not spurned but postponed that others might benefit. And the benefit I refer to is not the fruit of this material thing, this anointing of the body; it is a spiritual benefit symbolized by it. On this occasion he who is the teacher of religious devotion refused these choice ointments that are symbols of devotion, because it was his absolute wish that they be used for the spiritual and corporal welfare of his needy members. A short time previously, when valuable ointment was poured on his head and even on his feet, did he try to prevent it? Did he not rather oppose those who objected to it? Simon, indignant that he should allow a sinful woman to touch him, received a stern rebuke in the course of along parable, while others who grumbled at the waste of the ointment were silenced with the question: "Why are you upsetting

the woman?"

8. There have been times, if I may digress a little, when as I sat down sadly at the feet of Jesus, offering up my distressed spirit in sacrifice, recalling my sins, or again, at the rare moments when I stood by his head, filled with happiness at the memory of his favors, I could hear people saying: "Why this waste?" They complained that I thought only of myself when, in their view, I could be working for the welfare of others. In effect they said: "This could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." But what a poor transaction for me, to forfeit my own life and procure my own destruction, even if I should gain the whole world! Hence I compared such talk to the scriptural mention of dead flies that spoil the perfumed oil, and remembered the words of God: "O my people, those who praise you lead you into error." But let those who accuse me of indolence listen to the Lord who takes my part with the query: "Why are you upsetting this woman?" By this he means: "You are looking at the surface of things and therefore you judge superficially. This is not a man, as you think, who can handle great enterprises, but a woman. Why then try to impose on him a burden that to my mind he cannot endure? The work that he performs for me is good, let him be satisfied with this good until he finds strength to do better. If he eventually emerges from womanhood to manhood, to mature manhood, then let him engage in a work of corresponding dignity."

9. My brothers, let us give due honor to bishops but have a wholesome fear of their jobs, for if we comprehend the nature of their jobs we shall not hanker after the honor. Let us admit that our powers are unequal to the task, that our soft effeminate shoulders cannot be happy in supporting burdens made for men. It is not for us to pry into their business but to pay them due respect. For it is surely churlish to censure their doings if you shun their responsibilities; you are no better than the woman at home spinning, who foolishly reprimands her husband returning from the battle. And I add: if a monk happens to notice that a prelate working in his diocese lives with less constraint than he, and with less circumspection; that he speaks more freely, eats as he pleases, sleeps when he will, laughs spontaneously, gives rein to anger, passes judgment readily, let him not rush precipitately to wrong conclusions, but rather call to mind the Scripture: "Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good." For you do well in keeping a vigilant eye on your own behavior, but the man who helps many acts with more virile purpose fulfilling a higher duty. And if in the performance of this duty he is guilty of some imperfection, if his life and behavior are less than

regular, remember that love covers a multitude of sins. I want this to be a warning against that twofold temptation with which the devil assails men in religious life: to covet the fame of a bishop's status, and to pass rash judgment on his excesses.

10. But let us get back to the ointments of the bride. Do you not see how that ointment of merciful love, the only one that may not be wasted, is to be preferred to the others? The fact that not even the gift of a cup of cold water goes unrewarded shows that nothing actually is wasted. The ointment of contrition of course is good, made up as it is from the recollection of past sins and poured on the Lord's feet, because "You will not scorn, O God, this crushed and broken heart." But better by far is the ointment of devotion, distilled from the memory of God's beneficence, and worthy of being poured on Christ's head. Concerning it we have God's own witness: "Whoever makes thanksgiving his sacrifice honors me." The function of merciful love, however, is superior to both; it works for the welfare of the afflicted and is diffused through the whole Body of Christ. By this I do not mean the body which was crucified, but the one that he acquired by his passion. An ointment that by its excellence blinds him to the worth of the other two is beyond question the best, for he said: "What I want is mercy, not sacrifice." This, more than all the other virtues, is diffused, like a perfume from the breasts of the bride, who desires to conform in all things to the will of her Bridegroom. Was it not the fragrance of mercy that enveloped the death-bed of Tabitha. And like a life-giving perfume, it hastened her resurgence from death.

Finally a few brief words to end this present subject. The man whose speech intoxicates and whose good deeds radiate may take as addressed to himself the words: "Your breasts are better than wine, redolent of the best ointments." Now who is worthy of such a commendation? Which of us can live uprightly and perfectly even for one hour, an hour free from fruitless talk and careless work? Yet there is one who truthfully and unhesitatingly can glory in this praise. She is the church, whose fullness is a never-ceasing fount of intoxicating joy, perpetually fragrant. For what she lacks in one member she possesses in another according to the measure of Christ's gift and the plan of the Spirit who distributes to each one just as he chooses. The Church's fragrance is radiated by those who use their money, tainted though it be, to win themselves friends; she intoxicates by the words of her preachers, who drench the earth and make it drunk with the wine of spiritual gladness, and yield a harvest through their perseverance. With the bold assurance of one confident that her breasts are

better than wine and redolent of the choicest perfumes, she lays claim to the title of bride. And although none of us will dare arrogate for his own soul the title of bride of the Lord, nevertheless we are members of the Church which rightly boasts of this title and of the reality that it signifies, and hence may justifiably assume a share in this honor. For what all of us simultaneously possess in a full and perfect manner, that each single one of us undoubtedly possesses by participation. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your kindness in uniting us to the Church you so dearly love, not merely that we may be endowed with the gift of faith, but that like brides we may be one with you in an embrace that is sweet, chaste and eternal, beholding with unveiled faces that glory which is yours in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

### **SERMON 13 OUR THANKSGIVING AND GOD'S GLORY**

Just as the sea is the ultimate source of wells and rivers, so Christ the Lord is the ultimate source of all virtue and knowledge. For who has power to endow us with virtues if not he who is the King of Glory? And what are we told in the canticle of Anna but that God himself is the Lord of all knowledge? Hence from him as from a well-head comes the power to be pure in body, diligent in affection and upright in will. Nor is this all. From him too come subtlety of intellect, splendor of eloquence, urbanity of bearing; from him, knowledge and words of wisdom. Indeed in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Shall I add still more? Chaste thoughts, just judgments, holy desires -- are they not all streams from that one spring? If the waters that surround us inevitably return to the sea by hidden underground channels, only to gush forth again without fail and without weariness for the refreshing of our sight and the relief of our needs, why should not those spiritual streams return unerringly and without ceasing to their native source, and flow back without interruption to irrigate our souls? Let the rivers of grace circle back to their Fountain-Head that they may run their course anew. Let the torrent that springs in heaven be channeled back to its starting point, and be poured on the earth again with fertilizing power. You ask how this will be done. It will be done in accord with Paul's advice: "In all things give thanks to God." If you can credit yourself with wisdom or with virtue, realize that the credit is due rather to Christ, who is the Power and the Wisdom of God.

2. "Who is so mad," you say, "as to presume otherwise?" Actually nobody. Even the Pharisee gives thanks, although his justice merits no praise from God. And if, as the Gospel points out, his act of thanksgiving does not increase his grace, why is this so? Because the pieties that our mouths proclaim will not justify the pride of our heart in the sight of him who is repelled by the arrogant. "God is not mocked, O Pharisee. What do you have that was not given to you?" "Nothing," he says, "and therefore I offer thanks to the giver." "But if there is really nothing, then you had no antecedent merit to warrant your reception of the things of which you boast. And if you admit this, then in the first place it is futile to give yourself airs at the expense of the publican who does not possess as much as you because he has not received as much. Secondly, make sure you realize that God's gifts are entirely his own; if you attribute to yourself some of the glory and honor that are his, you may deservedly be convicted of fraud, of attempting to defraud God. If you brazenly boast of gifts as though they were your own, I should prefer to believe you are deceived, not that you wish to defraud. It is an error I should hope to correct. But when you make thanksgiving, you manifest that you regard nothing as your own, you wisely acknowledge that your merits are really God's gifts. When you despise others, however, you betray the inner reality of your condition, you are speaking from a double heart, with one lending your tongue to a lie, with the other usurping the honor due to truth. Never would you judge the publican more despicable than yourself if you did not consider that you are more honorable than he. But how will you reply to the principle laid down by the Apostle: 'Honor and glory to the only God?' How reply to the angels who in their teaching distinguish between what God reserves for himself and what he is willing to share with men? Their song is: 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to men of good-will.' Do you not perceive that the Pharisee, in offering thanks, honors God with his lips but in his heart pays tribute to himself? And so, through force of habit more than by intention or inclination, you will hear people of all sorts pronouncing words of thanks, for even the wickedest persons will offer a perfunctory thanks to God in achieving a sexual conquest, for any kind of crime because things fell out well and prosperous, at least according to their estimation, when their perverse will was fulfilled. For instance, when the thief has bagged the loot for which he has planned, he celebrates in the privacy of his hide-out and says: "Thank God! I have not watched in vain, the night's work has not been wasted." The murderer will brag and express his thanks for the overthrow of a rival, for having had revenge on an enemy. And the adulterer will utter an irreverent "Thank you God," as he capers with delight on having gone to bed at last with the woman he has long pursued.

3. It is clear then that God will listen only to the thanks that spring from a pure and genuine simplicity of heart. I say "pure heart," because when those who boast of their evil conduct presume to thank God for it, they bring him down to the level of their own profligacy and make him share their wicked pleasures. God says to people of this kind: "Do you really think I am like you? I charge, I indict you to your face." I have added the word "genuine" because of the hypocrites who praise God for the goods they possess, but only with their lips; the heart denies what the tongue professes, and since they act deceitfully in God's very sight, their knavery can merit only hatred." The former impiously seek to involve God in their evil doings; the latter, by a fraudulent twist, would make God's gifts their own. The vice of the former is so stupid, so worldly, and even in a sense so brutish, that I do not feel impelled to put you on your guard against it; that of the latter, however, constitutes an habitual temptation in the lives of religious and spiritual persons. Great and rare is the virtue of those who do great things without becoming conscious of their greatness, whose holiness is manifest to all but to themselves. To me there is no virtue like that, when you are universally admired, and remain contemptible in your own eyes. You are indeed a faithful servant if you do not try to grasp for yourself the manifold glory of God, which while not coming from you, nevertheless passes through you. Then, in the words of the Prophet, you reject extortionate profit and wave away bribes from your hands. Then, in accord with the Lord's command, your light shines before men, not for your own glory but for that of your Father in heaven. An imitator of Paul and of all the loyal preachers who would not preach themselves, you seek not your own interests but those of Jesus Christ. Consequently you too will be privileged to hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have shown you can be faithful in small things, I will trust you with greater."

4. Although Joseph knew that he was entrusted with the care of his Egyptian master's home and all its goods, he was also aware that its mistress was an exception, and he refused to have relations with her. "My master," he said, "has handed over all his possession to me. He has withheld nothing from me except yourself, because you are his wife." He knew that woman is the reflection of man's glory, and that it would be base ingratitude on his part to tarnish the honor of the man by whose will he had been raised to honor. Gifted with the wisdom of God, he perceived that a husband is extremely concerned about his wife's honor because identified with his own; so much his own that he will not entrust her to another. Hence he would not presume to tamper with what was outside his

control.

What then? Shall a man be jealous of his own glory and yet dare to wish to defraud God of his, as if God were indifferent? But God says otherwise: "I will not yield my glory to another." But what will you give to us, O Lord, what will you give to us?" "Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you." "It is enough for me; I accept gratefully what you give and I give up what you keep for yourself. This contents me, I do not doubt that it is for my advantage. I renounce all claim to glory lest by usurping what you do not permit, I may deservedly lose what you offer. I wish for peace, I yearn for it and for nothing more. The man who is not satisfied with peace is not satisfied with you. For you are our peace, you have made us both one. To be reconciled with you, to be reconciled with myself, this is necessary for me, and it suffices. For whenever you set me in opposition to you I become a burden to myself. I am on my guard, and will neither be ungrateful for the gift of peace nor intrude sacrilegiously on your glory. May your glory remain yours, O Lord, in undiminished splendor; all will be well with me if I shall have your peace."

5. After the overthrow of Goliath the people were happy to have peace restored; David alone basked in the glory of it. Joshua, Jephthah, Gideon, Samson, and even Judith who was but a woman, had glorious victories over their enemies in their day; and though their people enjoyed the hard-won peace, they did not share in the heroes' glory. Judas Maccabaeus too was renowned for the many triumphs by which his bravery in battle gained peace for a jubilant people, but were they privileged to participate in his glory? Scripture says there was very great joy, not glory, among the people. Now I ask: has the Creator of all things achieved less than these heroes, that he should not be allowed his unique glory? Alone he made all things, alone he conquered the enemy, alone he freed the captives, and then in his glory is he to be saddled with a colleague? "My own arm then was my mainstay." he said; and again: "I have trodden the wine-press alone. Of the men of my people not one was with me." What right have I to share in the triumph if I stood outside the battle? It would be sheer impertinence on my part to lay claim to glory without victory, or to victory without a fight. But let the mountains bring a message of peace for the people, a message of peace for us rather than glory. To him who alone both fought and conquered is glory reserved. This is how I desire it to be: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to men of good-will." But an evil will rather than a good one characterizes the man who refuses to be content with peace, whose haughty looks and proud



heart are bent on grasping at the glory that is God's. He is therefore ever devoid of peace, never within reach of glory.

Who would believe the wall if it said it produced the ray of light that falls on it through the window? Or if the clouds should proclaim that they create the showers, what would they merit but ridicule? It is utterly clear to me that the channels do not beget the rivers that run between their banks, nor lips and teeth the words of wisdom that proceed from them, although my bodily senses may tell me that and no more.

6. If I discern in the saints something that is worthy of praise and admiration, and proceed to examine it in the clear light of truth, I become aware that what makes them appear praiseworthy and admirable really belongs to another, and I praise God in his saints. Both Elisha and the great Elijah raised the dead to life, but not by any power of their own. They were the ministers of a power that became manifest to us in these new and wonderful deeds, the power of God who lived in them. By his own nature invisible and inaccessible, he becomes somehow visible and a source of wonder in the lives of those who love him. But he alone is worthy of admiration, for he alone performs the marvels that merit it. We do not praise the pen or the brush when we judge a script or painting, nor do we attribute fame for eloquence to the lips and tongue of the orator. Listen for a moment to the Prophet: "Does the axe claim more credit than the man who wields it, or the saw more strength than the man who handles it? It would be like the cudgel controlling the man who raises it, or the club moving what is not made of wood!" Thus everybody who boasts is against the Lord unless his boasting is in the Lord. If I am to boast, then I learn from Paul why and in what: "Our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience."

I may boast securely if my conscience tells me that I in no way detract from the glory of my Creator, because I shall be speaking in the Lord rather than against him. Not only are we not forbidden to boast in this fashion, we are even encouraged by the words: "You seek glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God." This ability to glory in God alone can come solely from God. Nor is this glory a small thing; it is as real as the truth which is its object, and is a truth so rare, that only an exceptional few even of the perfect can glory in perfectly possessing it. Off with them then, those men who are but a breath, men who are but a delusion; let them deceive each other in their vanity. For the man who makes a wise boast will put his work to the test, he will carefully

scrutinize it in the light of the truth, and then his reason for boasting will be in himself and not in the patronage of his neighbor. I am but a fool if I entrust my reputation to the casket of your lips, and then begin to beg it of you when I feel the need for it. Am I not simply putting myself in your power, to be praised or blamed as you please? But I am determined to be responsible for myself, I shall be loyal in my own regard. And yet not entirely to myself; rather have I put my trust in him who can take care of all that I have committed to him until that Day. It is safe in his hands, it will be given back in full. Then all those who set no store by the praise of men will receive the sure praise of God. For those whose glory is in earthly loves will find confusion at the end," even as David said: "Those who please men are confounded, because God has rejected them."

7. Dear brothers, if you can grasp these truths none of you will hanker after praise in this life, because if you win any favor here below and fail to thank God for it, you are defrauding him. How is it possible for you to glory, you who are but stinking dust? Will you dare glory in holiness of life? But it is the Spirit who makes holy; that Spirit who is God's, not yours. Even if you are resplendent with prodigies and miracles it is still God's power working through your hands. Or have you made an elegant speech that wins the plaudits of the crowd? But it is Christ who has given you the eloquence and wisdom. For what is your tongue but the pen of a writer? And it is yours only on loan, a talent committed to you, to be demanded again with interest. If you work willingly and persevere in producing results, you will receive the reward of your labor. If you do otherwise your talent will be taken from you, but the interest will still be demanded, and you will suffer the fate of a dishonest and lazy workman. All praise, therefore, for the manifold gifts of grace with which you are endowed, must be given to him who is the author and giver of all that is praiseworthy. Make sure your thanks are not the pious cant of the hypocrite, nor the empty gesture of the worldling, nor yet the constraint imposed on beasts of burden; but, as one has a right to expect of dedicated men, let it be full of confident sincerity, of meaningful devotion and of becoming, well-regulated cheerfulness. Therefore, while offering up the sacrifice of praise and fulfilling our vows from day to day, let us make every endeavor to put meaning into our observance, to fill the meaning with love, our love with joy and our joy with realism; let that realism be tempered with humility and our humility be buoyant with liberty. Then we shall advance toward our goal with the untrammelled passions of a purified mind. We may even find ourselves at times living beyond our normal powers through the great intensity of our affections and our spiritual joy, in jubilant encounters, in the light of God, in sweetness, in the

Holy Spirit, all showing that we are among those envisioned by the Prophet when he said: "Lord, they will walk in the light of your favor; they will rejoice in your name all day and exult in your righteousness."

8. But perchance one of you will say to me: "What you say is good, but your words ought to be relevant to your theme." Just wait a little while; I am not unmindful. Have I not undertaken to expound that text: "Your name is oil poured out"? This is my set task, at this I must toil. Whether what I have so far said is necessary you will see; my purpose now is to explain to you briefly that it is not irrelevant. Do you not remember that the last commendation of the breasts of the bride concerned the sweet-smell of the ointments? Is it not becoming then that the bride should acknowledge this fragrance to be the Bridegroom's gift rather than claim it as her own? It is along these lines that all I have hitherto said must be understood. "If my breasts exhale this sweet perfume," she says, "if they are so attractive, it is not because of any art or merit of mine, O my Bridegroom, but because of your generosity, because the oil of your name has been poured out." So much for the relevance of my text.

9. Finally, the explanation of the little verse that has been the occasion of this prolonged sermon on the abominable vice of ingratitude, must wait for another time and another sermon. Now it suffices to remind you that if the bride -would not in the least dare to attribute to herself any virtue or any grace, how much less should we, who are mere youths? Let us therefore imitate this attitude of the bride and say: "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory." Let us assert this not merely in word and in speech but in deed and in truth lest something that I fear very much may be said even of us: "But though they outwardly loved him and used their tongues to lie to him, in their hearts they were not true to him, they were unfaithful to his covenant." Let us cry out therefore with a voice that comes more from the heart than from the lips: "Save us, O Lord, our God, and gather us from among the pagans, that we may praise your holy name rather than our own, and find our happiness in praising you instead of ourselves, for ever and ever."

## **SERMON 14 THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AND THE JEWS**

"God is renowned in Judah, his name is great in Israel." The pagan people who

walked in darkness have seen a great light, a light that shone in Judah and Israel, and filled them with longing to draw near and be enlightened. Those who once were not a people at all would now be formed into a people, and the two, converging like walls, would be joined as one by the one corner-stone. This union's fruit is peace. For confidence was imparted in the very utterance of the invitation already proclaimed: "Rejoice, pagans, with his people." Hence their desire to draw near; but the synagogue stood in their way, insisting that a church gathered from among the pagans would be both unclean and unworthy, taunting them as idolaters of the lowest type, blinded by the darkness of ignorance. "By what right do you come here?" the Jews challenged. "Do not touch me." "Why?" asked the pagans. "Is God the God of the Jews alone and not of the pagans too? And though it be true that we have no right, he is not lacking in tender mercy. Surely he is not merely just? He must be merciful too. O Lord, deal with me tenderly and I shall live; your mercies are manifold; give me life according to that justice of yours that can be gentle as mercy itself." What will the just and merciful Lord do when he discovers the Jews boasting of the law and flattering themselves on their own righteousness, blind to their need for mercy and scorning the pagans who feel that need? The pagans on the other hand, in their consciousness of sin, admit their unworthiness, and implore mercy rather than judgment. What, I ask, will the judge do, that judge in whom judgment and mercy are so equally immanent that neither precedes the other? What can be more fitting than that he should deal with each according to their dispositions, judgment for the one, mercy for the other? If the Jew wants judgment, let him have it; and let the pagans give due honor to God for his mercy. And the judgment is this, that those who despise God's loving righteousness and make self-righteousness their norm, merit censure rather than approval; left to their own righteousness they are fettered, not liberated.

2. The Jews' position is a consequence of the law, which has never led anyone to perfection; it is a burden which neither they nor their ancestors were strong enough to support. But the synagogue is stubborn, and looks with disdain on the easy yoke and the light burden. It is in good health, it has no need of a doctor, of the grace of the Spirit. It puts its trust in the law: let the law give it what freedom it can. But no law has yet been made that could impart life; rather does it kill, for the written letters bring death. Hence the words of Christ: "I have told you already, you will die in your sins." And this, O Synagogue, is the judgment you have demanded. Blind and quarrelsome, you will be abandoned to your error until the whole pagan world that your pride has spurned and your envy

obstructed, shall have entered the fold and bowed to the God who is renowned in Judah, whose name is great in Israel. It is for judgment that he has come into this world, so that those without sight may see and those with sight turn blind. Yet this will not be total blindness, for the Lord will not entirely reject his people, but will reserve for himself survivors such as the Apostles and the multitude of believers who in heart and mind are one. He will not cast them off forever, a remnant will be saved. Mindful of his mercy he will come again to the aid of Israel his servant, so that mercy may still accompany judgment even where it finds no occasion for exercise. For if the Jews were dealt with according to their deserts there would be judgment without mercy to those who had not themselves been merciful.

Judah possesses in abundance the oil of the knowledge of God, but like a miser keeps it bottled up for his own benefit. Though I intercede with him he shows no compassion, he will not lend. For himself alone the worship of God, for himself alone the knowledge of God, the custody of God's great name. Far from being zealous for his own welfare, he is jealous of me.

3. You therefore, since you are my Lord, must take up my cause, that your great name may be still more glorious, the jars of oil be multiplied still. Let it increase, let it brim over, let it be poured out and diffused in rivulets among the pagans, that every man may experience the salvation of God. Why should the ingrate Jew demand that all the oil of salvation be confined to the beard of Aaron? The source of this oil is not the beard but the head, and the head exists not merely for the beard but for the whole body. The downward flow touches first the beard but not exclusively. For all that comes from above is transmitted to the members further down. Let them descend then, these supernal unguents, down upon the breasts of the Church, who with great eagerness does not disdain to wring them from the beard till she is totally bedewed with grace. Nor does she prove ungrateful, for she proclaims: "your name is oil poured out." But let it run still further down till it reaches the very hem of her garment, even me the last of all and the least worthy, yet a part, nevertheless; of that garment. For I, a little one in: Christ, by the very right of love crave these graces from the Church's maternal breasts. And if some man, roused to envy at the sight of your goodness, should grumble at your generosity, you, O Lord, must be my security; from you let my judgment come, not from the haughty Israel. Indeed you must speak too in your own defense and tell the calumniator -- because you are calumniated for bestowing gifts gratuitously -- tell him: "I choose to pay the last-comer as much as I pay you." The Pharisee objects to this. Why does he grumble? My claim

rests on the will of the judge, the most just assessment of merit that there is, and the richest source of reward. Is he not free to act according to his will? The mercy that he bestows on me does not injure you in the slightest. "Take what belongs to you and go." If it be his will to save such as I, what loss is that to you?

4. Over-rate your merits as you please, and boast of your labors -- the mercy of the Lord is better than life itself. I confess that I have not borne the burden of the day and the heat; it is the will of the Father that my yoke should be easy and my burden light. I work for scarcely an hour; and if longer, I do not notice it because of love. Let the Jew rely on his own strength; I am free to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do. This is how I make good what I lose in time and work. The Jew places his trust in the text of a covenant, I in God's good pleasure; nor shall my trust be reputed as folly, because his will is a spring of life. That will reconciles the Father to me, restores my inheritance with immense liberality, with music, songs and feasting, with the resounding joys of a whole family in celebration. If that elder brother of mine becomes indignant and chooses to eat a kid outside with his friends rather than the fatted calf in my company in my Father's house, he shall have his answer: "It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found." The Jews still make merry outside with their friends the demons, who are pleased to see them swallowing down the insipid kid of their own sinfulness, to see them stowing it away, foolishly concealing it in their sluggish stomach. Meantime they despise the justice of God, and with the purpose of substituting their own, declare themselves free of sin, free of the need to kill the fatted calf, because in their own eyes they are made clean and just by the works of the law. But when the evil of the written letter that brings death is torn in two at the death of the crucified Word, the Church, led by the Spirit of liberty, daringly penetrates to his inmost depths, acknowledges and takes delight in him, occupies the place of her rival to become his bride, to enjoy the embraces of his newly-emptied arms. In the fire of her spirit, clinging to the Lord Christ who distills and pours on her whole being the oil of gladness in a measure not given to her companions, she says: "Your name is oil poured out." What wonder if she be anointed, since she embraces him who is the Anointed One?

5. Therefore the Church reclines within, but only the Church of the perfect during the present time. We too, however, have grounds for hope. Imperfect though we be, let us rest outside the doors, rejoicing in hope. Meantime the bride and

Groom are within by themselves, enjoying the mystery of their mutual embraces, safe from the jarring turmoil of carnal desires, from the restless intrusion of sensible images. But the bevy of bridesmaids, who cannot as yet overcome the giddiness of youth, must wait outside. Let them wait with confidence for the fulfillment of those words they have so often read: "The virgins in her train are led into the king, her ladies-in-waiting follow." And that each may know of what spirit she is, I mean by virgins those who committed themselves to Christ before they could be stained by sinful love. Persevering steadily in this union, they are all the more happy the earlier they made choice of him. Those called ladies-in-waiting, however, are the ones who, once conformed to this world by shamefully prostituting themselves on the full tide of carnal lust to the princes of this world, whose law was lustful desire, are now at last filled with the shame that urges them to rid themselves of that deformity and to hasten to put on the form of the new man with a sincerity all the greater the more late the decision. Both classes make progress, they grow neither weak nor weary, though still far from feeling the urge to exclaim: "Your name is oil poured out." Neither have they the courage to address the Bridegroom directly. Yet if they make the effort to follow more exactly the footsteps of the bride, they will find delight in the odor at least of the overflowing oil, and so be inspired with the desire to strive for more excellent ends.

6. I am not ashamed to admit that very often I myself, especially in the early days of my conversion, experienced coldness and hardness of heart, while deep in my being I sought for him whom I longed to love. I could not yet love him since I had not yet really found him; at best my love was less than it should have been, and for that very reason I sought to increase it, for I would not have sought him if I did not already love him in some degree. I sought him therefore that in him my numbed and languid spirit might find warmth and repose, for nowhere could I find a friend to help me, whose love would thaw the wintry cold that chilled my inward being, and bring back again the feeling of spring-like bliss and spiritual delight. But my languor and weariness only increased, my soul melted away for sorrow, even to the verge of despair. All I could do was repeat softly to myself: "Who can stand before his cold?" Then, at times when I least expected, at the word or even the sight of a good and holy man, at the memory of a dead or absent friend, he set his wind blowing and the waters flowing, and my tears were my food day and night. How can I explain this? Only by ascribing it to the odor from the oil that anointed the friend in question. For me there was no anointing, but rather the experience that came by another's mediation. And so, though made happy by

this favor, I was also embarrassed and humiliated: it was a mere puff of perfumed air, not the dewy sprinkling for which I longed. Given only the pleasure of its odor and not of its touch, I saw myself as unworthy of him to whom God himself would communicate his sweetest joys. And even now, if a similar experience should happen to me, I eagerly grasp at the proffered gift, I am grateful for it, even though I feel sad beyond words that I have not won it by my own merits, that despite my urgent request it has not passed directly from his hand to mine. I feel ashamed that the remembrance of human goodness should affect me more powerfully than the thought of God. In these straits I cry out with a groan: "When shall I come and behold the face of God?" Many of you too, I feel, have had similar experiences, and have them even still. In what light then must we view them? I hold that through them our pride is shown up, our humility guarded, brotherly love fostered and good desires aroused. One and the same food is medicine for the sick and nourishment for the convalescent; it gives strength to the weak and pleasure to the strong. One and the same food cures sickness, preserves health, builds up the body, titillates the palate.

7. But let us return to the words of the bride and listen attentively to what she says, that we may learn to relish what she relishes. I have already said that the bride is the Church. She it is to whom much has been forgiven because she loves much. Hence, when her rival hurls recriminations at her, she turns them to her own advantage. Hence too we find her more gentle under correction, more patient under trial; hence the ardor in her love, the wisdom in her decisions; the humility in her self-knowledge, the attractiveness in her modesty; she is prompt to obey, sincere and thoughtful in offering thanks. Finally, while the Jews, as we have said, murmur even when calling to mind their own merits, their endurance through the burden of the day and the heat, the Church remembers only the favor received and says: "Your name is oil poured out."

8. This is plainly Israel's witness of praise to the name of the Lord, not indeed the Israel that lives by the law of the flesh, but he that lives by the law of the Spirit. For how could the carnal Israel utter such words? It is not that he has no oil, but that it is not poured out. He has it but keeps it hidden; he has it in his Scriptures but not in his heart. In the sight of men he clings to the letter of the law; he clutches in his hand a jar that is full but sealed, nor will he open it and be anointed. It is within you, deep within, that the Spirit's unction is poured out: open and be anointed and you will no longer be a rebellious house. Why store oil in jars and never apply it to your limbs? Of what use to ponder over your books on



the name of our holy Savior if you exclude his love from your lives You have the oil: pour it out and experience its threefold power. The Jew scorns these monitions but you will listen to them. I wish now to tell you what I have so far left unmentioned: why the name of the Bridegroom is compared to oil. There are three reasons. But because he is called by many names, since that which is adequate to him is known to none -- for it is ineffable -- we must first invoke the Holy Spirit that he may be pleased to reveal to us that one name above all others on which he wishes us to concentrate in this instance, for he has given no written indication of it. This topic however must wait for another time. For even if I now knew all I should need to know, even if you should not feel oppressed nor I wearied, the hour-glass indicates the end. Hold fast to all that I have drawn to your attention, for tomorrow I shall not repeat it. The job I have undertaken, the task in hand, is to explain why the Bridegroom's name is compared to oil, and what this name is. And since I may not trust in my own powers for what I am to say, prayers must be offered that the Bridegroom himself, Jesus Christ, our Lord, may reveal it to us by his Spirit. To him all honor and glory for ever and ever." Amen.

## **SERMON 15 THE NAME OF JESUS**

Wisdom is a kindly spirit, and easy of access to those who call upon him. Quite often he anticipates their request and says: "Here I am." Listen now to what, because of your prayers, he has revealed to me about the subject we postponed yesterday; be ready to gather the ripe fruit of your intercession. I put before you a name that is rightly compared to oil, how rightly I shall explain. You encounter many names for the Bridegroom scattered through the pages of Scripture, but all these I sum up for you in two. I think you will find none that does not express either the gift of his love or the power of his majesty. The Holy Spirit tells us this through the mouth of one of his friends: "Two things I have heard: it is for God to be strong, for you, Lord, to be merciful." With reference to his majesty we read: "Holy and terrible is his name;" with reference to his love: "Of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved." Further examples make it clearer still. Jeremiah says: "This is the name by which he will be called: 'the Lord our righteous one' " -- a name suggesting power; but when Isaiah says: "His name will be called Emmanuel," he indicates his love. He himself said: "You call me Master and Lord." The first title implies love, the

second majesty. Love's business is to educate the mind as well as to provide the body's food. Isaiah also said: "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, God, the Mighty One, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The first, third and fourth signify majesty, the others love. Which of these therefore is poured out? In some mysterious way the name of majesty and power is transfused into that of love and mercy, an amalgam that is abundantly poured out in the person of our Savior Jesus Christ. The name "God" liquefies and dissolves into the title "God with us," that is, into "Emmanuel. " He who is "Wonderful" becomes "Counselor"; "God" and "the Mighty One" become the "Everlasting Father" and the "Prince of Peace." "The Lord our righteous one" becomes the "gracious and merciful Lord." This process is not new: in ancient times "Abram" became Abraham and Sarai became "Sara"; and we are reminded that in these events the mystery of the communication of salvation was pre-figured and celebrated.

2. So I ask where now is that warning cry: "I am the Lord, I am the Lord," that resounded with recurring terror in the ears of the people of old. The prayer with which I am familiar, that begins with the sweet name of Father, gives me confidence of obtaining the petitions with which it continues. Servants are called friends in this new way, and the resurrection is proclaimed not to mere disciples but to brothers.

Nor am I surprised if, when the time has fully come, there is an outpouring of Jesus' name as God fulfills what he had promised through Joel, an outpouring of his Spirit on all mankind, since I read that a similar event took place among the Hebrews in former times. But I feel that your thoughts fly ahead of my words, that you already guess what I intend to say. How is it, I ask, that God's first answer to Moses' question was: "I Am Who I Am," and "I Am has sent me to you"? I doubt if even Moses himself would have grasped its import if it had not been poured out. But it was poured and he understood it; and not only poured but poured out, for an inward pouring had already occurred: the citizens of heaven already possessed it, the angels knew it. Now it is sent abroad, and what was infused into the angels as an intimate secret was poured out upon men, so that henceforth they could justly proclaim from the earth: "Your name is oil poured out," if the obstinacy of a thankless people did not prevent it. For he had said: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

3. Run then, O pagans, salvation is at hand, that name is poured out which saves all who invoke it. The God of the angels calls himself the God of men. He poured

out oil on Jacob and it fell on Israel. Say to your brothers: "Give us some of your oil. If they refuse, ask the Lord of the oil to give it to you. Say to him: "Take away our reproach."

See that no envious tongue insults your beloved, whom it has pleased you to call from the ends of the earth with a compassion all the greater for her unworthiness. Is it fitting, I ask, that a wicked servant should shut out the invited guests of the master of the house? You have said: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." Of no more than these? Pour out, continue to pour; open your hand still wider and satisfy the desire of everything that lives.

Let them come from the east and the west and take their places with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Let them come, let the tribes come up, the tribes of the Lord, to praise his name according to his command to Israel. Let them come and take their place, let them feast and be filled with gladness, let the banqueters sing as one man the resounding song of exultation and praise: "Your name is oil poured out." One thing I know: if we find that the porters are Andrew and Philip, we shall not be repulsed when we ask for oil, when we desire to see Jesus. Philip will at once tell Andrew, and Andrew and Philip will tell Jesus. And what will Jesus say? Precisely because he is Jesus he will tell them: "Unless a wheat-grain falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest." Let the grain die therefore, and let the harvest of the pagans spring to fruition. It is necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and that penance and forgiveness of sin should be preached in his name, not alone in Judea but even among all nations, because from the sole name of Christ thousands upon thousands of believers are called Christians, whose hearts all re-echo: "Your name is oil poured out."

4. I recognize now the name hinted at by Isaiah: "My servants are to be given a new name. Whoever is blessed on earth in that name will be blessed by the Lord, Amen." O blessed name, oil poured out without limit! From heaven it pours down on Judea and from there over all the earth, so that round the whole world the Church proclaims: "Your name is oil poured out." And what an outpouring! It not only bathes the heavens and the earth, it even bedews the underworld, so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld should bend the knee in the name of Jesus, and that every tongue should acclaim: "Your name is oil poured out." Take the name Christ, take the name Jesus; both were infused into the angels, both were poured out upon men, even upon men who rotted like

animals in their own dung. Thus you became a savior both of men and beasts, so countless are your mercies, O God. How precious your name, and yet how cheap! Cheap, but the instrument of salvation. If it were not cheap it would not have been poured out for me; if it lacked saving power it would not have won me. Made a sharer in the name, I share too in its inheritance. For I am a Christian, Christ's own brother. If I am what I say, I am the heir of God, co-heir with Christ. And what wonder if the name of the Bridegroom is poured out, since he himself is poured out? For he emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave.

Did he not even say: "I am poured out like water"? The fullness of the divine life was poured out and lived on earth in bodily form, that all of us who live in this body doomed to death may receive from that fullness, and being filled with its life-giving odor say: "Your name is oil poured out." Such is what is meant by the outpouring of the name, such its manner, such its extent.

5. But why the symbol of oil? I have yet to explain this. In the previous sermon I had begun to do so when another matter that seemed to demand mention suddenly presented itself, though I may have dallied with it longer than I intended. In this I resembled the valiant woman, Wisdom, who put her hand to the distaff, her fingers to the spindle. Skillfully she produced from her scanty stock of wool or flax a long spool of thread, out of which she wove the material that made warm clothes for the members of her household. The likeness between oil and the name of the Bridegroom is beyond doubt, the Holy Spirit's comparison of the two is no arbitrary gesture. Unless you can persuade me otherwise, I hold that the likeness is to be found in the threefold property of oil: it gives light, it nourishes, it anoints. It feeds the flame, it nourishes the body, it relieves pain: it is light, food, medicine. And is not this true too of the Bridegroom's name? When preached it gives light, when meditated it nourishes, when invoked it relieves and soothes. Let us consider each point.

6. How shall we explain the world-wide light of faith, swift and flaming in its progress, except by the preaching of Jesus' name? Is it not by the light of this name that God has called us into his wonderful light, that irradiates our darkness and empowers us to see the light? To such as we Paul says: "You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord." This is the name that Paul was commanded to present before kings and pagans and the people of Israel; a name that illumined his native land as he carried it with him like a torch, preaching on all his journeys that the night is almost over, it will be daylight soon

-- let us give up all the things we prefer to do under cover of the dark; let us arm ourselves and appear in the light. Let us live decently as people do in the day-time. To every eye he was a lamp on its lamp-stand; to every place he brought the good news of Jesus, and him crucified. What a splendor radiated from that light, dazzling the eyes of the crowd, when Peter uttered the name that strengthened the feet and ankles of the cripple, and gave light to many eyes that were spiritually blind! Did not the words shoot like a flame when he said: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk"? But the name of Jesus is more than light, it is also food. Do you not feel increase of strength as often as you remember it? What other name can so enrich the man who meditates? What can equal its power to refresh the harassed senses, to buttress the virtues, to add vigor to good and upright habits, to foster chaste affections? Every food of the mind is dry if it is not dipped in that oil; it is tasteless if not seasoned by that salt. Write what you will, I shall not relish it unless it tells of Jesus. Talk or argue about what you will, I shall not relish it if you exclude the name of Jesus. Jesus to me is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, a song in the heart.

Again, it is a medicine. Does one of us feel sad? Let the name of Jesus come into his heart, from there let it spring to his mouth, so that shining like the dawn it may dispel all darkness and make a cloudless sky. Does someone fall into sin? Does his despair even urge him to suicide? Let him but invoke this life-giving name and his will to live will be at once renewed. The hardness of heart that is our common experience, the apathy bred of indolence, bitterness of mind, repugnance for the things of the spirit -- have they ever failed to yield in presence of that saving name? The tears dammed up by the barrier of our pride -- how have they not burst forth again with sweeter abundance at the thought of Jesus' name? And where is the man, who, terrified and trembling before impending peril, has not been suddenly filled with courage and rid of fear by calling on the strength of that name? Where is the man who, tossed on the rolling seas of doubt, did not quickly find certitude by recourse to the clarity of Jesus' name? Was ever a man so discouraged, so beaten down by afflictions, to whom the sound of this name did not bring new resolve? In short, for all the ills and disorders to which flesh is heir, this name is medicine. For proof we have no less than his own promise: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." Nothing so curbs the onset of anger, so allays the upsurge of pride. It cures the wound of envy, controls unbridled extravagance and quenches the flame of lust; it cools the thirst of covetousness and banishes the itch of unclean desire. For when I name Jesus I set before me a man who is

meek and humble of heart, kind, prudent, chaste, merciful, flawlessly upright and holy in the eyes of all; and this same man is the all-powerful God whose way of life heals me, whose support is my strength. All these re-echo for me at the hearing of Jesus' name. Because he is man I strive to imitate him; because of his divine power I lean upon him. The examples of his human life I gather like medicinal herbs; with the aid of his power I blend them, and the result is a compound like no pharmacist can produce.

7. Hidden as in a vase, in this name of Jesus, you, my soul, possess a salutary remedy against which no spiritual illness will be proof. Carry it always close to your heart, always in your hand, and so ensure that all your affections, all your actions, are directed to Jesus. You are even invited to do this: "Set me as a seal," he says, "upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm." Here is a theme we shall treat of again. For the moment you have this ready medicine for heart and hand. The name of Jesus furnishes the power to correct your evil actions; to supply what is wanting to imperfect ones; in this name your affections find a guard against corruption, or if corrupted, a power that will make them whole again.

8. Judea too has had her Jesus -- Messiahs in whose empty names she glories: For they give neither light nor food nor medicine. Hence the Synagogue is in the darkness still, enduring the pangs of hunger and disease, and she will neither be healed nor have her fill until she discovers that my Jesus rules over Jacob to the ends of the earth, until she comes back in the evening, hungering like a dog and prowling about the city. True, they were sent on in advance, like the staff preceding the Prophet to where the child lay dead, but they could not see a meaning in their own names because no meaning was there. The staff was laid upon the corpse but produced neither voice nor movement since it was a mere staff. Then he who sent the staff came down and quickly saved his people from their sins, proving that men spoke truly of him when they said: "Who is this man that he even forgives sins?" He is no other than the one who says: "I am the salvation of my people." Now the Word is heard, now it is experienced, and it is clear that, unlike the others, he bears no empty name. As men feel the infusion of spiritual health they refuse to conceal their good fortune. The inward experience finds outward expression. Stricken with remorse I speak out his praise, and praise is a sign of life: "For from the dead, as from one who does not exist, praise has ceased." But see! I am conscious, I am alive! I am perfectly restored, my resurrection is complete. What else is the death of the body than to be deprived

of life and feeling? Sin; which is the death of the soul, took from me the feeling of compunction, hushed my prayers of praise; I was dead. Then he who forgives sin came down, restored my senses again and said: "I am your deliverer." Why wonder that death should yield when he who is life comes down? "For a man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved." The child who was dead is now yawning, he yawns seven times as if to say: "Seven times daily I praise you, Lord." Take note of this number seven. It is not a meaningless number, it bears a sacred significance. But because you are by now sated, we should do well to hold this theme over for another sermon, and come with whetted appetites to a table newly laden, to which we are invited by the Church's Spouse, our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 16 MEANING OF THE NUMBER '7' AND THE QUALITIES OF TRUE CONFESSION**

What then does that number seven mean? I wonder if anyone among us is so ingenuous as to think that those yawnings of the boy were devoid of import, their number fortuitous. I for one do not consider the Prophet's actions meaningless when he stretched himself on top of the child, putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes to his eyes, and his hands on his hands. These deeds were done and described under the Holy Spirit's guidance chiefly for the instruction of people who have succumbed to their own corrupt passions, who have been taught to play the fool by the wisdom of this world. "For a perishable body presses down the soul, and this tent of clay weighs down the teeming mind." So no one should be surprised or annoyed if I spend some time in minute scrutiny of these matters, for in them the Holy Spirit has stored his treasures; I know that by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit. And I must warn those present whose agile minds outstrip my thoughts, and in every sermon anticipate the end almost before they have grasped the beginning, that I am obliged to adapt myself primarily to minds that are less keen. But my purpose is not so much to explain words as to move hearts. I must both draw the water and offer it as a drink, a work that I shall not accomplish by a spate of rapid comments but by careful examination and frequent exhortation. I had indeed hoped that the discussion of the mystical sense of our text would not have detained us so long. I actually thought that one sermon would suffice, and that passing quickly through that

shadowy wood where allegories lurk unseen, we should arrive, after perhaps one day's journey, on the open plain of moral truths. We did not succeed. We have already been two days traveling and the end has yet to be reached. Looking into the distance a man can see the tops of trees and the mountain peaks; but his eye cannot range over the great glens beneath them, nor pierce the pathless thickets. For example, was it possible for me to have foreseen a reference to Elisha's miracle, that suddenly sprang to my mind as I discussed the call of the pagans and the rejection of the Jews? And now that we have come upon it we must linger over it for a while, and later return to what we have left aside, for that too is food for our souls. Hunters and hounds sometimes abandon the quarry they have raised, and pursue another unexpectedly encountered.

It adds strength to my confidence to think that the great Prophet, mighty in work and word, came down from heaven's high mountain to visit me who am but dust and ashes, pitying me in my spiritual death, stretching himself upon me as I lay prone, diminishing his stature to be equal to my littleness, sharing with my blindness the light of his own eyes, freeing my dumbness with the kiss of his mouth, and bracing my weak hands with the touch of his own. To linger amid these truths is my delight; my heart is enlarged, my whole inward being is enriched, my very bones vibrate with praise. He performed this work once for the human race as a whole, but daily each one of us may experience it in ourselves, when the light of understanding floods our heart, when helpful words grace our speech, when good deeds flow from our hands. By his grace we can think what is true, we can express it to advantage, we can live it with efficacy. Here you are provided with a durable three-ply cord for drawing souls out of the devil's prison, and towing them after you into the kingdom of heaven; if you think rightly, if you speak worthily, and if you confirm what you say by your life. Covering my eyes with his own he adorned my interior faculties with the twin lights of faith and understanding. joining his mouth to this dead mouth of mine, he gave the kiss of peace, for while we were yet sinners and dead to righteousness, he reconciled us to God. Setting his mouth to mine he breathed into it a second time the breath of life, but this time a holier life; for at first he created me a living being, then re-made me a life-giving spirit. As he placed his hands on mine I was imbued with the power of doing good, with the grace of obedience. He certainly showed how strong his hands can be, that he might train my hands for war and my fingers for battle.

The child yawned seven times. One yawn would have sufficed to manifest the



extraordinary miracle, but this multiplicity allied to the eminent character of the number seven, warns us of mystery. First of all, if you regard the whole human race as one huge dead corpse, you may see in every land the Church springing up in the life received from the recumbent body of the prophet and opening her mouth seven times to perform her seven-fold daily praise. Then, turning your gaze on yourself, you will know that you live a spiritual life and satisfy the demands of this mystical number if you control your five senses by the twofold law of charity; if, as the Apostle says, you put your bodies at the service of righteousness for your sanctification, as once you put them at the service of vice and immorality; or again, if while putting these five senses to work for your neighbor's salvation, you complete the number seven by these two, praise of the mercy and of the justice of God.

But I have still another interpretation for these seven yawnings; they are seven experiences without which a man cannot be sure that the renewal of his spiritual life is true and efficacious. Four pertain to the feeling of sorrow for sin, three to oral confession. If you are alive, if you can speak and feel, you must be aware of these experiences in yourself. For you will know that you have fully regained your power of awareness if you perceive your conscience to be stung by a fourfold compunction, by two kinds of shame and by two kinds of fear. Later on I shall speak of the three kinds of confession that raise our lives to the perfection implied by the number seven. Did not Jeremiah, for instance, produce four lamentations?

You too should follow this Prophet's example in lamenting your own sins. Think of God as your creator, think of him as your benefactor, your father, your lord. You have sinned against each of these titles to your loyalty, be sorry for them one by one. The first and last should arouse your fear, the second and third your shame. One is not afraid of the Father, because he is a father. A father's instinctive attitude is to spare and to be merciful. And if he does strike it is with a light rod, not with a heavy staff; and when he strikes he heals. It is the Father's voice that says: "When I have struck it is I who heal." There is no reason to be afraid of a father, for although there are times when he does use the rod, it is always to correct, never for revenge. To think that I have offended the Father certainly gives ground for shame, but not for fear. Not by the impulse of carnal intercourse, as by my earthly father, was I begotten, but by God's will, by his word of truth. And for me thus begotten he did not spare his only-begotten Son. He revealed himself to me as a true father, but I did not respond in turn as a son.

With what effrontery then do I, bad son that I have been, dare look on the face of so good a father? I am filled with shame for conduct so unworthy of my lineage, ashamed of my ignoble life in presence of so great a father. Dissolve in streams of tears, O eyes of mine; let blushes suffuse my cheeks, shame cover them like a cloud. Let my life be worn out with sorrow, my years with sighs. O shame! What harvest have I gathered from deeds that now humiliate me? If I have sown in the flesh, from the flesh I shall reap only corruption; if in the world -- both it and its lusts pass away. Unhappy madman that I was, I did not blush to prefer things perishable and vain, mere dreams, things destined to be lost, to the love and honor of my eternal Father. I am confounded, doubly confounded to hear him say: "If I am a Father, where is my honor?"

But as well as being my Father, he has overwhelmed me with favors, countless favors that repeatedly bear witness against me: the daily nourishment of my body, the prolonged gift of time, and above all the blood of his beloved Son that cries out to him from the earth. I blush for my ingratitude. To add to my confusion I stand convicted of returning evil for good and hatred for love. But I need fear my benefactor no more than I need fear my Father. For he is a genuine benefactor who showers down his gifts abundantly and never reproaches. There is no reproach on account of the gifts, because they are gifts; and his favors were bestowed upon me, not sold. And finally, these gifts are irrevocable. But the more I appreciate his kindness, the more I am compelled to recognize my unworthiness. Be ashamed and grieve, O my soul, for though it becomes him not to utter reproaches nor revoke his gifts, it is entirely unbecoming for us to remain ungrateful and forgetful. Alas! even now what return shall I make to Him for all His goodness to me?

But if shame proves slow in accomplishing what it ought, then let fear be summoned to aid us. Let it be aroused and spur us on.

Forget for a while the loving titles of Benefactor and Father, and turn to names of harsher import. Read that he who is the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, is also the Lord God of revenge, God the judge, righteous and strong," terrible his deeds among men, a jealous God. For you he is Father and Benefactor, for himself he is Lord and Creator, since as Scripture says: "The Lord has made everything for himself." If therefore he defends and preserves for you what is yours, will he not ultimately be concerned too for what is his? Will he not demand the honor due to his authority? That is why the wicked man has angered God; he

said in his heart: "He will not demand it" And what does he mean by saying in his heart: "He will not demand it," except that he has no fear that he will demand it? But he will demand it to the last farthing, and repay the arrogant with interest. He will expect allegiance from the man he has redeemed, honor and worship from the creature he has made.

So then, the Father dissembles, the Benefactor forgives, but not so the Lord and Creator; he who will spare a son will not spare an imposter, a wicked servant. Consider how dreadful it is, how terrifying, to have despised your Creator, the Maker of all things, to have offended so majestic a Lord. Majesty and sovereignty inspire fear especially the majesty and sovereignty of God. If human laws impose the death penalty on one guilty of treason against the head of the State, what will be the fate of those who spurn God's omnipotence? He touches the mountains and they belch forth smoke, and will a pinch of common dust, that a casual breeze can scatter forever, dare provoke his awe-inspiring majesty? He surely is to be feared who, after he has killed the body, has the power to cast into hell. I dread the thought of hell, I dread the face of the Judge in whose presence even the angels are filled with fear. Terror unnerves me at the thought of the Almighty's anger, the fury in his countenance, the crash of a world tumbling to ruin, the immense fires and uncontrollable storm, and above it all the Archangel's menacing trumpet, and the voice of him who destroys. I am terrified of the fangs of the monster of hell, the pit that swallows up sinners, where demons roar as they devour. I recoil in horror from the gnawing worm, the rolling fires, the smoke and sulfurous mist, the whirling storms; I recoil from the encroaching vastness of the dark. Who will turn my head into a fountain, and my eyes into a spring of tears, that I may forestall that weeping and gnashing of teeth, the unyielding shackles on hands and feet, the heavy bonds that oppress, that strangle, that burn and never consume. Why, O mother, did you bring to birth a son destined for sorrow, the prey of bitterness, the object of God's indignation, doomed to remorse without end? Why did you take upon your knees, why did you feed at your breasts a child who was born to be fuel for the fire?

There is no doubt that the man who thinks like this has recovered his senses; this twofold fear and twofold shame account for four yawnings.

The three which remain are found in oral confession, a sign that he may no longer be described as devoid of voice and sensibility, provided that the confession proceeds from a humble, guileless and trusting heart. These

conditions will be fulfilled if he confesses all that pricks his conscience with humility, sincerity and trust. There are people who find their joy in doing wrong, and their delight in deceitfulness, of whom the Prophet says: "They proclaim their sin like Sodom." But of these there is no question in the present discourse, they are like the lay-folk outside our enclosure with whom we have nothing to do.

However, we do sometimes hear men who have committed themselves to religious life and wear the religious habit, shamelessly boasting as they recall their past misdeeds: the duels they fought, their cunning in literary debate or other kinds of vain display that worldlings cherish, behavior of its nature pernicious and injurious, so opposed to spiritual well-being. These are signs of a mind still worldly, and the humble habit worn by religious of this kind serves but as a cloak for their old sinfulness rather than as proof of their renewal in holiness. Some recount past vices as though to express sorrow and repentance for them, but their minds thrill with a secret pleasure, they delude themselves rather than purge their sins; but God is not mocked. Without putting off the old nature they have pretended to put on the new. The old yeast is not extruded and cast out by such a confession, it is simply fixed in its place. In the Psalmist's words: "My bones grew old while I cried out all day long." I am ashamed when I recall the audacity of monks who were utterly without shame in boasting of things they should have bewailed in sackcloth; about how, even after receiving the holy habit, they craftily outwitted their neighbor, how they cheated a brother in a business deal, how they recklessly retaliated on those who insulted or reproached them, returning evil for evil, a curse for a curse.

There is a kind of confession all the more calamitous for its subtle concealment of vanity, as when we unhesitatingly reveal our ugly or immoral behavior, not because we are humble but because we want to appear so. But to seek praise for humility is to destroy the virtue in it. The truly humble man prefers to pass unnoticed rather than have his humility extolled in public. He is happy to be overlooked; if he has any pride at all it consists in despising praise. What is more perverse, more unbecoming, than that confession, humility's guardian, should join battle on the side of pride, that you should seek to enhance your reputation by means ordained to diminish it? What a marvel of boasting! You cannot be regarded as holy unless you appear polluted by wickedness! But a confession that makes humility a sham not only fails to merit pardon, it provokes God's anger. Of what avail was it to Saul that he confessed his sin when reprimanded by Samuel? Surely it was a sinful confession since it did not wash away his guilt.

For when did the Master of humility, who by his very nature is inclined to give grace to the humble, ever scorn a humble confession? It is impossible for him not to be appeased if the humility professed in words finds its source in the heart. For these reasons I have said confession should be humble.

It must also be guileless. If you are guilty beware of the device of excusing your intention, a thing that is hidden from men's eyes; and do not make light of a fault that is grave; nor ascribe it to another person's influence, since no one is compelled to do what his will disapproves. The first of these maneuvers is not a confession but a defense; instead of placating, it provokes. The second reveals ingratitude; the more one lessens the fault the more one diminishes the glory of him who forgives it. A favor is bestowed less willingly when it is felt that the recipient will offer but a paltry thanks for what he deems unnecessary. One who devalues the gift is liable to forfeit the pardon that he needs; and the person who, in confession, attempts to minimize his guilt, finds himself in that situation. The example of Adam warns us about the third ruse: he did not deny his guilt, yet he failed to obtain pardon, doubtless because he would make Eve a sharer in his guilt. To involve another in the crime of which you are accused is a form of excuse. The prophet David teaches that this desire to excuse oneself when reprehended, is not merely fruitless but even fraught with danger. He describes excuses for sins as wicked words, and begs and beseeches God to preserve his heart from so great a fault. And rightly so. A man who excuses himself sins against his own interests by rejecting the medicine of forgiveness; with his own mouth he cuts himself off from life. What greater wickedness is there than to take up arms against your own salvation; to stab yourself with the sword-point of your own tongue? If a man is mean to himself, to whom will he be good?"

You must confess your sins in the spirit of faith, that you may confess them with the hope that does not doubt of pardon; to do otherwise would be to condemn rather than justify yourself. Both Judas who betrayed the Lord, and Cain who murdered his own brother, admitted their sin, but without hope of pardon. Judas said: "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood;" Cain's words were: "My sin is too great to be pardoned." Though they admitted the truth of their sin, their confession was fruitless because faithless. These three qualities of confession, along with the four previously ascribed to compunction, complete the number seven.

When these conditions are fulfilled both in your sorrow and your confession,

when you are thus assured of life, you become certain that Jesus, who produced these divinely willed effects in you, was called by no empty name; it was not in vain that he followed after the staff he had sent in advance. He did not come in vain because he did not come empty. How could he have been empty in whom the fullness of divine life dwelt? Nor was the Holy Spirit given to him by measure. He came too when the fullness of time had come. All of which indicate that he was full in every sense. And truly filled, since the Father had anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows; he anointed and sent him to us full of grace and truth. He was anointed that he might anoint others. All who merited to receive of his fullness have been anointed by him. Hence he could say: "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord." He came, as you have heard, to medicate our wounds and to soothe our pains; therefore he came as one anointed, meek and humble and full of mercy for all who call upon him. He knew he was coming down to those who were sick, and he appeared to them as the one they needed. Because their infirmities were manifold he showed his competence by bringing with him medicines of all kinds. He brought "a spirit of wisdom and insight, a spirit of counsel and strength, a spirit of knowledge and piety, and a spirit of fear of the Lord."

These are so many vials filled with medicines prepared by this physician from heaven, to heal the wounds of the unfortunate man who fell into the hands of robbers. They are seven in number, very apt for producing the seven yawnings of which we have been speaking. These vials contained the spirit that gives life. From them he poured oil upon my wounds; wine too but in smaller measure. In doing this he adapted himself to my weakness, that mercy might triumph over judgment, just as oil rests on top of wine in a vessel. So he took five measures of oil with him, but only two of wine. Fear and strength are symbolized by the wine; the other five, because of their soothing effects, are represented by the oil. In the spirit of strength, like a hero fighting-mad with wine, he descended into Sheol, breaking bronze gates open and smashing iron bars, to bind up the strong man and free those held in prison. He descended too in the spirit of fear, not afraid but inspiring fear.

O Wisdom, sweetly powerful and powerfully sweet, with what skill of healing in wine and oil do you restore my soul's health. Powerfully for me and sweet to me. You deploy your strength from one end of the earth to the other, ordering all

things sweetly, driving off all hostile powers and cherishing the weak. Heal me, Lord, and I shall really be healed, I shall sing praise to your name and cry out: "Your name is oil poured out. Not wine poured out—for I do not wish to be put on trial—but oil, for you crown me with love and tenderness. Oil by all means, for since it floats above all other liquids with which it mixes, it clearly designates a name that is above all names. Name utterly dear, utterly sweet! O Name renowned, predestined, sublime and exalted above all forever. This is truly the oil that makes a man's face shine, that anoints the head of the man who fasts, causing him to ignore the oil of sinners. This is the new Name which the mouth of the Lord has conferred, the Name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." Not the Jews only, but all who call on that name will be saved, for it has been poured out without limit. This was the Father's gift to the Son, the Church's Bridegroom, our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 17 ON THE WAYS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE ENVY OF THE DEVIL**

O you think we have advanced far enough into a sphere that is holy to God, in unraveling this wonderful mystery, or should we dare follow the Holy Spirit into still more secret places to search for meanings that may yet be attained? For the Holy Spirit searches not only the minds and hearts of men but even the depths of God; so whether it be into our own hearts or into the divine mysteries, I shall be secure in following him wherever he goes. He must keep watch over our hearts and our minds, lest we think him present when he is not, and follow the erratic light of our own feelings instead. He comes and goes as he wills, and no man can easily discover whence he comes and whither he goes. Ignorance of this will not lessen our hopes of salvation; but to be ignorant of when he comes and when he goes would certainly involve risk. Unless we use the utmost vigilance in attending to these gift-laden visits of the Holy Spirit, we shall neither desire him when he seems absent nor respond to him when present. If he withdraws from us to stimulate us to a more eager search for him, how shall we seek for him if we do not perceive his absence? Or when he comes to animate us, how shall we give him the welcome due his majesty if his visit passes unnoticed? The man who is indifferent to his absence will be led astray by other influences; the man who is blind to his coming cannot offer thanks for the visit.

When Elisha perceived that his master was about to be taken away from him, he asked for a favor. He obtained it, as you know, only on the condition that he would see him as he was being taken. This is an allegory recorded for our instruction. This story of the prophets carries both a lesson and a warning, to make us vigilant and careful about the work of salvation ceaselessly performed in our inmost being with all the skill and sweetness of the Holy Spirit's artistry. If we do not wish to be deprived of a twofold gift, let us make sure that this heaven-sent Director, who can teach us all things, is never taken away from us without our knowledge. Let him never find us unprepared when he comes, but always with faces uplifted and hearts expanded to receive the copious blessing of the Lord. Let him find us like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage-feast, for he never comes empty-handed from heaven's richly-laden table. Therefore we must watch, even hour by hour, for we do not know at what hour he will come and depart again. The Holy Spirit comes and goes, and if a man can stand firmly only with his support, it follows that he must fall when abandoned by him; fall, yes, but never fatally, since the Lord supports him by the hand. Persons who are spiritual or whom the Holy Spirit purposes to make spiritual, never cease to experience these alternations; he visits them every morning and tests them at any moment. For a righteous man falls seven times and rises again, provided that he falls in the daytime and so is able to see his fall, to know that he has fallen, to make up his mind to rise and look for a helping hand, and say: "Your favor, Lord, stood me on a peak impregnable; but then you hid your face and I was terrified."

It is scarcely possible to avoid doubts about the truth when we lack the light of the Holy Spirit; but it is another thing to hanker after erroneous opinions which a man might easily guard against if he would acknowledge his ignorance, as Job did when he said: "And even if it be true that I have erred, my error remains with myself." Ignorance, an evil mother, has borne two evil daughters, falsehood and doubt, the first is the more reprobate, the other more an object of compassion; the first more pernicious, the other more troubled. When the Holy Spirit speaks, both of these yield, for he speaks not merely the truth but the certain truth. He is the Spirit of truth with whom falsehood cannot be reconciled; and the spirit of wisdom, who will not accept opinions that are equivocal or obscure, since he is a reflection of eternal life, so pure that he pervades and permeates all things. When this Spirit is silent we must be alert and hold falsehood in abhorrence, even if bound in the clutches of perplexing incertitude. Doubting the truth of an opinion is vastly different from rashly proposing something of which we know



nothing. Either let the Holy Spirit always speak, a procedure that no influence of ours can procure; or let him at least warn us when he withdraws into silence, that his very silence may then be our guide; otherwise, mistakenly thinking he is still leading us on, we shall pursue with disastrous assurance an erroneous course of our own. Even if he does keep us in suspense, may he never abandon us to what is false. A man may tentatively express what is false without incurring the guilt of a lie, while another man may lie in asserting a truth of which he has no knowledge. Because the first man, far from maintaining non-facts to be facts, rather states he believes what he does believe, he speaks in truth, even though what he believes is not true; but the second man, who says he is certain when he is not, does not speak in truth, even though what he asserts is true.

I have said these things for the sake of those who are unaware of such pitfalls, and now I shall follow what I trust to be the guidance of the Spirit who lights my way, taking account as far as I can of the warnings I have issued. I will try to be faithful to my own teaching lest someone say in turn to me: "You who teach others, will you not teach yourself?" We must observe the distinction between what is clear and what is doubtful, not casting doubt on the one nor rashly upholding the other. This is where we must hope for direction from the Spirit, for even assiduous efforts on our part may be altogether insufficient.

What man knows whether the judgment of God over men, that we discussed in a previous sermon, was not preceded by a judgment pronounced in heaven?

Is it possible that Lucifer, son of the morning, yielding precipitately to the impulse of pride, began to envy the outpouring of oil on our human race before he was cast out into the darkness? In the rage that possessed him did he murmur and say to himself: "Why this waste?" I do not hold that the Holy Spirit has made this known, nor do I hold the contrary; I simply do not know. But even though some may think it incredible, it could have happened that because of his lofty endowments of wisdom and grace, he could have foreseen that members of the human race would one day be raised to be his equals in glory. And if he did foresee this it was because it was revealed to him in the Word of God. Then, stung by a wild impulse of envy, he plotted to maintain as subjects those whom he scorned as companions. To him they were by nature both lower and weaker, unworthy to be fellow-citizens, to share an equal glory. Was this impious scheming of his the consequence of his presumptuous self-exaltation, of his pretensions to a seat of power? For he said: I will climb up to the heavens; I will

sit in the recesses of the north. He would assume the very likeness of the most high God; for just as God, from his throne above the cherubim governs the whole angelic host, so Lucifer, from his usurped position, would control the race of men. God forbid. He plotted mischief in his bed, let him be trapped in his own plot, for we refuse to acknowledge any overlord but our Creator. Not the devil but the Lord will be judge of the world; he who is our God forever and ever will be our ruler forever and ever.

In heaven then, the devil conceived a bitter resentment that in the garden of Paradise came forth as iniquity, the offspring of malice, the mother of death and of every other misery; all these evils have pride as their first parent. For although it was through the devil's envy that death entered into the world, every sin has its origin in pride. But what has he gained from it? For you, Lord, are still in our midst, we are called by your name; and the people you have chosen, the Church of the redeemed, cries out: "Your name is oil poured out." And when I in turn am cast forth, this oil comes pouring after me and upon me, because despite your anger you remember to be merciful. Satan however has gained a hold over all who yield themselves to pride. He has made his realm of this world's darkness, yet his proud assaults serve but to increase the realm of the humble. While that realm remains his, temporal as it is, he establishes multitudes of the humble on high and eternal thrones. What a happy outcome, that this tyrant who would hammer the humble into subjection, should unwittingly be fashioning their eternal crowns for them. Attacking along every front, he is everywhere forced to yield. For always and everywhere it is God who will judge his people, it is he who will save the children of the needy and crush their oppressors. Always and everywhere he will defend his own, he will drive off their persecutors, take away the scepter that the wicked wield over the virtuous, lest the virtuous in turn should take to evil. A time is coming when he will break the bow completely, shatter the spear and burn the shields with fire. As for you, unhappy one, you set up your seat in the north, a region of cloud and cold; and see! the poor are being raised up from the dust and the needy from the dunghill, that they may be placed among the princes and attain a seat of honor. To your utter frustration you will see that the poor and needy have cause to praise God's name.

We thank you, Father of orphans and Vindicator of abandoned children, because a mountain fat and fertile has shed its warmth upon us. The heavens have poured down rain at the presence of the God of Sinai. The oil is poured out. There is universal glorification of the Name which Satan envied because it was

ours, and we live in its shadow. It is acclaimed, I repeat, in the hearts and words of children; even in the mouths of infants and babes at the breast praise is assured. The wicked one will see this and be filled with fury; an unrelenting fury that will feed the unquenchable fire prepared for him and his ministers. "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this."

How wonderful your love for me, my God, my love! How wonderful your love for me, everywhere mindful of me, everywhere eager for the welfare of one who is needy and poor, protecting him both from the arrogance of men and from the might of evil spirits. Both in heaven and on earth, O Lord, you accuse my accusers, you attack my attackers; everywhere you bring help, always you are close to my right hand lest I be disturbed. "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live, I will sing praise to my God while I have being." How great are his powers, what wonders has he not done! The first and greatest of his achievements is that revealed to me by one initiated to his mysteries, the Virgin Mary: "He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent away empty." The second you have heard of too, it is like the first: "That those without sight may see, and those with sight turn blind. These two judgments are the poor man's consolation, they enable him to say: "Remembering your rulings in the past, Lord, I take comfort."

Let us return now to ourselves, let us examine our paths; and in order to accomplish this in truth, let us invoke the Spirit of truth, let us call to him from the deep into which he has led us, because he leads us on the way by which we discover ourselves, and without him we can do nothing. Nor should we be afraid that he will disdain to come down to us, for the contrary is true: he is displeased if we attempt even the least thing without him. For he is not one "who passes and does not return," he leads us on from brightness to brightness because he is the Spirit of the Lord. Sometimes he fills us with rapture by communication of his light, sometimes he adapts himself to our weakness and sends beams of light into the dark about us. But whether we are raised above ourselves or left with ourselves, let us stay always in the light, always walk as children of the light. And now that we have passed through the shadow-land of allegories, it is time to explore the great plains of moral truths. Our faith has been strengthened, let our lives reveal its influence; our intellects have been enlightened, let them prescribe the right behavior. For they have sound sense who do this, if they direct their actions and understanding toward the praise and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever.

## **SERMON 18 THE TWO OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

"Your name is oil poured out." Of what truth of our interior life does the Holy Spirit wish to assure us by means of this text? He refers to the experience of a twofold operation, one by which he inwardly strengthens the virtues that lead us to salvation, the other by which he outwardly endows us with serviceable gifts. The former is of benefit to ourselves, the latter to our neighbors. For example, faith, hope and charity are given to us for our own sake, without them we cannot be saved. But the gift of wise and learned speech, the power to heal, to prophesy, and endowments of this kind without which we can fully achieve our own salvation, are undoubtedly meant to be used for our neighbor's salvation. And these operations of the Holy Spirit, that we take note of either in ourselves or in others, are named from their method of functioning: we call them infusion and effusion. To which of them may we suitably apply the words: "Your name is oil poured out"? Is it not to effusion? If he had meant infusion he would have said "poured in." When the bride says: "Your name is oil poured out," she refers to the perfumes sprinkled on her breasts, attributing their scent to the Bridegroom's name, as if it were an unguent poured on her breasts. Any man who perceives that he is endowed with an exterior grace enabling him to influence others, can also say to the Lord: "Your name is oil poured out."

2. At this point we need to be warned not to give away what we have received for our own welfare, nor to retain for ourselves what must be expended for others. For example, you keep for yourself what belongs to your neighbor, if along with your full endowment of interior virtues you are also adorned with the external gifts of knowledge and eloquence, and, through fear or sloth or ill-judged humility, smother this gift of speech that could be of help to so many, in a useless and even pernicious silence; for "the people's curse is on the man who hoards the wheat." On the other hand, you squander and lose what is meant to be your own if, before you are totally permeated by the infusion of the Holy Spirit, you rashly proceed to pour out your unfulfilled self upon others; you contravene the law which says: "You must not put the first-born of your herd to work, nor shear the first-born of your flock." You deprive yourself of the life and salvation which you impart to another if, lacking right intention and inspired by self you become infected with the poison of worldly ambition that swells into a deadly ulcer and

destroys you.

3. The man who is wise, therefore, will see his life as more like a reservoir than a canal. The canal simultaneously pours out what it receives; the reservoir retains the water till it is filled, then discharges the overflow without loss to itself. He knows that a curse is on the man who allows his own property to degenerate. And if you think my opinion worthless, then listen to one who is wiser than I: "The fool," said Solomon, "comes out with all his feelings at once, but the wise man subdues and restrains them." Today there are many in the Church who act like canals, the reservoirs are far too rare. So urgent is the charity of those through whom the streams of heavenly doctrine flow to us, that they want to pour it forth before they have been filled; they are more ready to speak than to listen, impatient to teach what they have not grasped, and full of presumption to govern others while they know not how to govern themselves.

I am convinced that no degree of the charity that leads to salvation may be preferred to that suggested by the Wise Man: "Have pity on your own soul, pleasing God." If I have but a little oil, sufficient for my own anointing, do you suppose I should give it to you and be left with nothing? I am keeping it for myself, utterly unwilling to proffer it to anyone except at the Prophet's bidding. And should any of you, thinking me to be better than I seem or than my words suggest, insist on asking for it, here is my answer to him: "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves." But charity, you reply, does not seek what is its own. And do you know why? It does not seek what is its own precisely because it has it. Who seeks for what he possesses? Charity never lacks what is her own, all that she needs for her own security. Not alone does she have it, she abounds with it. She wants this abundance for herself that she may share it with all; and she reserves enough for herself so that she disappoints nobody. For charity is perfect only when full.

4. But you, my brother, your salvation is not yet assured; your charity as yet is either non-existent or so meager and reed-like that it bends with every breeze, puts its trust in every spirit, and is carried along by every wind of doctrine; or it is so great that you transcend the limits of the commandment by loving your neighbor more than yourself, or yet again so unsound that, contrary to the commandment, it bows to flattery, flinches under fear, is upset by sadness, shriveled by avarice, entangled by ambition, disquieted by suspicions, tormented

by insults, exhausted by anxieties, puffed up by honors, consumed by envy. If you discover this chaos in your own interior, what madness drives you to insinuate yourself into other people's business? But listen to what a prudent and vigilant charity advises: "This does not mean that to give relief to others you ought to make things difficult for yourselves: it is a question of balancing." "Do not be over-virtuous." It is enough that you love your neighbor as yourself; this is the balancing to which the Apostle refers. David says: "My soul will feast most richly, on my lips a song of joy and, in my mouth, praise." To preclude a mere empty yawning, he wishes that infusion should precede the effusion, an infusion to the fullest capacity that gushes out. In this he shows prudence, his relieving of others does not embarrass himself; and he has a right intention, since he imitates him of whose fullness we have all received. You too must learn to await this fullness before

pouring out your gifts, do not try to be more generous than God. The reservoir resembles the fountain that runs to form a stream or spreads to form a pool only when its own waters are brimming over. The reservoir is not ashamed to be no more lavish than the spring that fills it. And so, he who is the primal Fountain of life, full in himself and filled with himself, gushed forth and danced into the secret places of the heavens about him, to fill them all with his favors. And having endowed these remotest heights and recesses, he burst upon our earth, saving men and beasts through his munificence, multiplying his mercies everywhere. When he had first filled up the secret places, his teeming mercies billowed over; they poured upon the earth and drenched it, to multiply its riches. You must imitate this process. First be filled, and then control the outpouring. The charity that is benign and prudent does not flow outwards until it abounds within. "My son," said Solomon, "do not let yourself drift away." And the Apostle says: "We ought then to turn our minds more attentively than before to what we have been taught, so that we do not drift away." See what is involved here. Are you holier than Paul, wiser than Solomon? Besides, I cannot see myself being enriched by your wasting of your powers. For if you are mean to yourself, to whom will you be good? Help me out of your abundance if you have it; if not, then spare yourself the trouble.

5. But I wish to remind you now of the principles necessary for our salvation and how to apply them, the truths that must be infused into us and their order of importance, before we can presume to pour ourselves out. Circumstances oblige me to be as brief as possible, for the time's quick passage demands that I bring this sermon to a close. Just as a doctor comes to a wounded man, so the Holy Spirit comes to the soul. Is it possible to find any person whom the devil's sword

does not wound, even after the wound of original sin has been healed by the medicine of baptism? Therefore, when the Spirit draws near to a soul that says: "My wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness," what is the first thing he should do? Before all else he must amputate the ulcerous tumor that has grown upon the wound and prevents its healing. This ulcer, caused by inveterate bad habits, must be sliced away with the scalpel of piercing sorrow. The pain will be bitter, but it can be alleviated with the ointment of devotion which is nothing other than the joy born of the hope of pardon. This in turn springs from the power of self-control, from victory over sin. Soon the victor is pouring out words of thanks: "You have loosed my bonds, I will offer you the thanksgiving sacrifice." He then applies the medicine of penance, a poultice of fastings, vigils, prayers, and other tasks that penitents perform. And as he toils he must be fed with the food of good works that he may not falter. We are not left in doubt about what the necessary food is: "My food," said Christ, "is to do the will of my Father." Hence works motivated by love, that are a sure source of strength, should accompany the performance of penances. For instance it is said: "Alms is a most effective offering for all those who give it in the presence of the Most High." Food causes thirst, therefore one must drink, so let the food of good works be moistened with the beverage of prayer, that a work well done may rest quietly in the stomach of conscience and give pleasure to God. In prayer one drinks the wine that gladdens a man's heart, the intoxicating wine of the Spirit that downs all memory of the pleasures of the flesh. It drenches anew the arid recesses of the conscience, stimulates digestion of the meats of good works, fills the faculties of the soul with a robust faith, a solid hope, a love that is living and true; it enriches all the actions of our life.

6. The sick man has had his food and drink; what should he do now but take his ease and let the sweat of his labors dry while he enjoys the quiet of contemplation? Falling asleep in the midst of his prayer he dreams of God; what he sees is a dim reflection in a mirror, not a vision face to face. However, although it be but a vague apprehension and not an actual vision, a fleeting glimpse of the sparkling glory as it passes, utterly delicate in its impact, yet he burns with love and says: "At night my soul longs for you and my spirit in me seeks for you." A love like this is full of zeal; it is a love becoming the Bridegroom's friend, the love that must inspire the faithful and prudent servant whom the Lord appoints over his household. It fills the soul's capacity, grows heated and brims over, gushing with abandon into streamlets. This is the love that cries out: "Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is scandalized and I am

not inflamed?" Let such a man preach, let him bear fruit, let him show new signs and do fresh wonders, for vanity can find no toehold in the man whom charity totally possesses. A total love is the law in all its fullness, it can effectively fill the heart's capacity. Finally God himself is love, and nothing created can satisfy the man who is made to the image of God, except the God who is love, who alone is above all created natures. The man who has not yet attained to this love is promoted to office at the gravest risk to himself, no matter how distinguished he be with other virtues. Even if he knows everything, if he gives all his goods to the poor and lets his body be taken for burning, without charity he is worthless. See how precious the graces that must first be infused, so that when we venture to pour them out we may dispense them from a spirit that is filled rather than impoverished. We need first of all compunction of heart, then fervor of spirit; thirdly, the labor of penance; fourthly, works of charity; fifthly, zeal for prayer; sixthly, leisure for contemplation; seventhly, love in all its fullness. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, accomplished by the process called infusion; and, in so far as it has taken place those services called effusion can be truly and hence safely performed to the praise and glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the same Holy Spirit lives and reigns, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 19 THE LOVES OF THE ANGELS**

The love-inspired bride will go on speaking, will chatter without end about her Bridegroom's excellence; and in order to entice more favors from him she shows that the ones already received have not been fruitless. To the words that have so long preoccupied us she adds: "That is why the maidens love you beyond measure." In effect she means: "It was not in vain, not without purpose, that you emptied out the power of your name, O Beloved, and poured it on my breasts; that is why the maidens love you so much." But why exactly? Because of the outpouring of your name, because of the breasts it has suffused. It is this that aroused their love of the Bridegroom, this that inspired their affections. No sooner had the bride received the infused gift than they, who could never stay far from their mother's side, at once perceived its fragrance. Filled with its sweetness they proclaim: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." The bride commends their devotedness: "This, O Beloved," she says, "is the fruit of the outpouring of your name, it is why the



maidens love you. They perceive the outpouring of something that surpasses their capacity to absorb in its entirety; and so they give you their love." Thus, as far as the maidens are concerned, the outpouring makes your name knowable, knowledge makes it lovable. Those whose capacity is greater enjoy the name in its fullness without the need for an outpouring.

2. The angels, looking with undeviating gaze into the profound abyss of the divine judgments, are filled with inexpressible joy at the sight of their supreme righteousness; it is their glory that, through their ministry, these judgments are put into operation and made known to men. For this reason they so rightly love the Lord Christ. Scripture says: "The truth is they are all spirits whose work is service, sent to help those who will be the heirs of salvation. And the archangels -- whom we must regard as differing in some degree from those called angels -- experience a delight that is filled with awe as they enter more closely into the counsels of eternal wisdom, and are commissioned to execute them with supreme skill at the proper place and time. Here you have the reason why these in turn love the Lord Christ. Other blessed spirits are named Virtues because their God-given vocation is to explore and admire with a happy curiosity the hidden and eternal causes of signs and wonders, signs that they display throughout the earth whenever they please by the powerful manipulation of the elements. As a consequence, these naturally burn with love for the Lord of Hosts, for Christ, the power of God. For it is an occupation full of sweetness and grace to contemplate the obscure mysteries of wisdom in Wisdom itself, a source of the greatest honor and glory that the effects produced by causes hidden in the Word of God should be revealed for the world's admiration by their ministry.

3. Yet other spirits are named Powers. While these find their happiness in contemplating and praising the divine omnipotence of our crucified Lord that extends so effectively into every place, they are also gifted with the power to overthrow and subdue the hostile power of demons and men in defense of those who will be the heirs of salvation. And surely these have a perfect reason for loving the Lord Jesus? Above them are the Principalities, who, contemplating him from their higher vantage point, clearly perceive that he is the source whence all things spring, the first-born of all creation. So great is the princely dignity with which they are endowed that nothing on earth is outside their dominion; and from their exalted seat of power they change and regulate at will the fall of kingdoms and governments and officials of any rank. According to individual merits they place those who are first in the last place and the last first; they pull down the

mighty from their thrones and exalt the lowly. This is the source of their incentive to love. Then come the Dominations, who also love the Lord. And the reason? With a presumption meriting only praise they probe more piercingly and sublimely into the limitless and insuperable lordship of Christ, whose presence and power reach everywhere throughout the universe. With a planned excellence, he bends all things from the highest to the lowest to the sway of his supremely upright will: the succession of the seasons, the movement of bodies, the propensities of the mind. He exercises this control with so provident a care that not one of these phenomena suffers the minutest failure in its functioning, not even by an iota; and he does it with an effort so facile that he feels not the least disquietude or misgiving. Fascinated by the flawless tranquillity with which the Lord of hosts governs the universe, they are caught up in a wondrous ecstasy of contemplation that is utterly delightful, utterly intense; and, consciously transported into the mighty ocean of God's splendor, they find themselves in a secret haven so serenely calm, so completely and securely peaceful, that while they recline there at ease the other angelic hosts, out of reverence for their prerogative of unimpeachable dominance, perform official services on their behalf.

4. Next come the Thrones, who are the seat of God. These spirits have a more just cause and more abundant reasons for loving than all the others we have mentioned. For when you enter the king's palace do you not see that though there are footstools, chairs and armchairs in every room, the king's throne is on a higher level? You do not have to ask where the king usually sits; you notice at once the seat that is more ornate and more elevated than the rest. And so you must understand that the adorned beauty of these spirits surpasses that of all the others, for upon them by a special and stupendous act of graciousness, the God of majesty has chosen to take his seat. If a seated posture symbolizes the teaching office, one may presume that Christ, the Wisdom of God, our unique teacher in heaven and on earth, although reaching everywhere because of his spiritual power, yet imparts a special light to these in particular on whom he is enthroned, and from this august rostrum teaches knowledge to angels and to men. The angels receive knowledge of God's judgments, the archangels of his counsels. The Virtues discover the time, place and nature of the signs they are to perform; and all, whether Powers or Principalities or Dominations, learn the extent of their official duties, the privileges of their exalted rank and a caution to which all must pay heed, not to abuse the power they have received for the sake of their own glory or convenience.

5. Then there are those multitudes of spirits called Cherubim. If we understand them in terms of their title, it seems to me that they possess nothing received from or by means of the others; for they are free to drink their fill from the very fountainhead, under the benign patronage of the Lord Jesus himself, who leads them on to the very fullness of truth and eagerly unfolds before their gaze the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hoarded in the depths of his being. Neither do the spirits we call Seraphim depend on them for anything, for God, who is love, has so drawn and assimilated them to himself, so filled them with the ardor of affection that burns in himself, that they seem to be one spirit with God, just as fire that flames into the air imparts its own heat and color to it and the enkindled air becomes part of the very fire. The Cherubim's bent is to contemplate God's infinite knowledge, the Seraphim adhere to the love that never ends. Hence they derive their names from that occupation in which each is preeminent: the name Cherub denotes one filled with knowledge, the name Seraph one inflamed with or inciting to love.

6. God, therefore, is loved by the angels on account of the supreme rectitude of his judgments; by the archangels for the flawless ordering of his plans; by the Virtues for the overwhelming benignity revealed in his working of miracles by which he most aptly attracts unbelievers to the faith; by the Powers because of the efficacy of that righteous power by which he repels and wards off the persecutions fomented by the evil against the good; by the Principalities for that eternal power that is the source whence every creature, high and low, spiritual and corporeal, takes the principle of its being and existence. It deploys its strength from one end of the earth to the other. The Dominations love him because of the inimitable serenity of his will, for although he controls all things by the strength of his arm, a greater power is revealed in the imperturbable tranquillity, the innate gentleness by which he sweetly orders all things. The Thrones are drawn to him by the good-will with which he ungrudgingly communicates the light of his wisdom and the anointing by which he freely teaches everything. The Cherubim are moved to love because the Lord is a God of knowledge; he knows what each one needs in order to be saved, and distributes with judicious providence the gifts that he sees to be advantageous to those who ask with proper dispositions: And finally the Seraphim love him because he is love, hates nothing that he has made, and desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

7. All these, as we see, love God according to their particular modes of understanding. But the maidens have less understanding and therefore less knowledge. They are not well equipped to penetrate sublime truths. Still infants in Christ, they must be fed with milk and oil. The source of their ability to love is in the breasts of the spouse. The odor of the spouse's outpoured oil rouses them to taste and experience how sweet the Lord is. And when she perceives the ardor of their love, she turns to the Bridegroom and says: "Your name is oil poured out, therefore the maidens love you beyond measure." What does she mean by "beyond measure"? Greatly, vehemently, ardently. Shall I say that this spiritual doctrine may be indirectly applied to those of you who have recently arrived, as a reproof of that indiscreet zeal or rather that incredibly obstinate intemperance which we have repeatedly attempted to restrain? You have no desire to be content with the common life. The regular fast is not enough for you, nor the solemn vigils, nor the rules of the house, nor the amount of food and clothing we have allotted to you. You want to have your own private ways rather than share what is common. In the beginning you entrusted yourselves to our care, why do you take charge of yourselves again? For now you have again for master not me but that self-will by which, on the testimony of your own consciences, you have so often offended God. It is that which urges you not to show pity for nature's needs, not to yield to reason, not to respect the advice or example of the seniors, not to obey us. Are you unaware that obedience is better than sacrifice? Have you not read in your Rule that what is done without the permission of the spiritual father shall be ascribed to presumption and vainglory and not reckoned meritorious? Have you not read in the Gospel the example of obedience given by the boy Jesus as a way to holiness for young people? For when he had stayed behind in Jerusalem and explained that he must be busy with his Father's affairs, yet because his parents would not concur with him he did not disdain to follow them to Nazareth; and so we have the Master obeying his disciples, God obeying men, God's Word and Wisdom obeying a carpenter and his wife. And what is the comment of Sacred Scripture? It says: "He was subject to them." How long will you be wise in your own eyes? God entrusts himself to mortals and obeys them, and will you still walk in your own ways? You received the good spirit, but you have not used it well. What I now fear is that you may receive another in its stead that, under the appearance of good, will cause you to fall, and you who began in the spirit will end in the flesh. Do you forget that Satan often transforms himself into an angel of light? God is Wisdom, and he wills to be loved not only sweetly but wisely; as St Paul says: "Let your service be one that is worthy of thinking beings." For if you neglect knowledge, the spirit of error will lead you astray

effortlessly by means of your own zeal. The cunning enemy has no more effective stratagem for robbing the heart of love than to induce a man to indulge it rashly and unreasonably. Hence I intend to provide you with certain rules of conduct whose observance should benefit those who love God. But the time has come to end this sermon, so tomorrow, if God gives me life and the leisure to speak to you, I shall attempt to explain those things which we have yet to consider. For then, refreshed by the night's rest, and, most important of all, having prayed, we shall assemble with greater eagerness, as is right, for a sermon on love, by the favor of our Lord, Jesus Christ, to whom be honor and glory for evermore. Amen.

## **SERMON 20 THREE QUALITIES OF LOVE**

I would like to begin with a word from St Paul: "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus, let him be anathema." Truly, I ought to love the one through whom I have my being, my life, my understanding. If I am ungrateful, I am unworthy too. Lord Jesus, whoever refuses to live for you is clearly worthy of death, and is in fact dead already. Whoever does not know you is a fool. And whoever wants to become something without you, without doubt that man is considered nothing and is just that. For what is man, unless you take notice of him? You have made all things for yourself, O God, and whoever wants to live for himself and not for you, in all that he does, is nothing. "Fear God, and keep his commandments," it is said, "for this is the whole duty of man." So if this is all, without this, man is nothing. Turn toward yourself, O God, this little that you have granted me to be; take from this miserable life, I beg you, the years that remain. In place of all that I lost in my evil way of living, O God, do not refuse a humble and penitent heart. My days have lengthened like a shadow and passed without fruits I cannot bring them back, but let it please you at least if I offer them to you in the bitterness of my soul. As for wisdom -- my every desire and intention is before you -- if there were any in me, I would keep it for you. But, God, you know my stupidity, unless perhaps it is wisdom for me to recognize it, and even this is your gift. Grant me more; not that I am ungrateful for this small gift, but that I am eager for what is lacking. For all these things, and as much as I am able, I love you.

2. But there is something else that moves me, arouses and enflames me even more. Good Jesus, the chalice you drank, the price of our redemption, makes me

love you more than all the rest. This alone would be enough to claim our love. This, I say, is what wins our love so sweetly, justly demands it, firmly binds it, deeply affects it. Our Savior had to toil so hard in this, in fact in making the whole world the Creator did not labor so much. Then he spoke and they were made; he commanded and they were created. But in saving us he had to endure men who contradicted his words, criticized his actions, ridiculed his sufferings, and mocked his death. See how much he loved us. Add to this the fact that he was not returning love but freely offering it. For who had given him anything first, that it should be returned to him? As St John said: "Not that we had loved him, but that he first loved us." He loved us even before we existed, and in addition he loved us when we resisted him. According to the witness of St Paul: "Even when we were still his enemies we were reconciled to God through the blood of his Son." If he had not loved his enemies, he could not have had any friends, just as he would have had no one to love if he had not loved those who were not.

3. His love was sweet, and wise, and strong. I call it sweet because he took on a human body, wise because he avoided sin, strong because he endured death. Even though he took a body, his love was never sensual, but always in the wisdom of the Spirit. "A Spirit before our face is Christ the Lord," jealous of us but with the jealousy of God, not man, and certainly not like that of the first man, Adam, for Eve. So those whom he sought after in a body, he loved in the spirit and redeemed in power. How sweet it is to see as man the Creator of humanity. While he carefully protected nature from sin, he forcefully drove death from that nature also. In taking a body he stooped to me, in avoiding sin he took counsel with himself, in accepting death he satisfied the Father. A dear friend, a wise counselor, a strong helper. Should I not willingly entrust myself to the one who had the good will, the wisdom, the strength to save me? He sought me out, he called me through grace; will he refuse me as I come to him? I fear neither force nor fraud which can snatch me from his hand. He is the one who conquered all things, even death, and tricked the serpent, the seducer of the world, with a holy deception. He was more prudent than the one, more powerful than the other. He took to himself a true body but only the likeness of sin, giving a sweet consolation to weak men in the one and in the other hiding a trap to deceive the devil. To reconcile us to the Father he bravely suffered death and conquered it, pouring out his blood as the price of our redemption. His divine majesty would not have sought me in chains unless he had loved me so tenderly, but he added wisdom to his affection by which he deceived the serpent. Then he added patience with which to appease his divine Father who had been offended.

These are the qualities of love of which I promised to tell you. But I have shown them to you first in Christ, to make them so much more acceptable to you.

4. Christian, learn from Christ how you ought to love Christ. Learn a love that is tender, wise, strong; love with tenderness, not passion, wisdom, not foolishness, and strength, lest you become weary and turn away from the love of the Lord. Do not let the glory of the world or the pleasure of the flesh lead you astray; the wisdom of Christ should become sweeter to you than these. The light of Christ should shine so much for you that the spirit of lies and deceit will not seduce you. Finally, Christ as the strength of God should support you so that you may not be worn down by difficulties. Let love enkindle your zeal, let knowledge inform it, let constancy strengthen it. Keep it fervent, discreet, courageous. See it is not tepid, or temerarious, or timid. See for yourself if those three commands are not prescribed in the law when God says: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole strength." It seems to me, if no more suitable meaning for this triple distinction comes to mind, that the love of the heart relates to a certain warmth of affection, the love of the soul to energy or judgment of reason, and the love of strength can refer to constancy and vigor of spirit. So love the Lord your God with the full and deep affection of your heart, love him with your mind wholly awake and discreet, love him with all your strength, so much so that you would not even fear to die for love of him. As it is written: "For love is strong as death, jealousy is bitter as hell." Your affection for your Lord Jesus should be both tender and intimate, to oppose the sweet enticements of sensual life. Sweetness conquers sweetness as one nail drives out another. No less than this keep him as a strong light for your mind and a guide for your intellect, not only to avoid the deceits of heresy and to preserve the purity of your faith from their seductions, but also that you might carefully avoid an indiscreet and excessive vehemence in your conversation. Let your love be strong and constant, neither yielding to fear nor cowering at hard work. Let us love affectionately, discreetly, intensely. We know that the love of the heart, which we have said is affectionate, is sweet indeed, but liable to be led astray if it lacks the love of the soul. And the love of the soul is wise indeed, but fragile without that love which is called the love of strength.

5. See how many examples support what we say. When the disciples were sad at the departure of their Master just before his ascension, after they had heard him talk about this subject, they heard him say: "If you loved me you would

rejoice because I am going to the Father." How can he say this? Didn't they love him when his departure made them so sad? In a way they loved him, and in another way they did not. Their love was more tender than prudent, it was sensual but not reasonable; they loved with the whole heart but not with the whole soul. What they loved was not for their own welfare, and so he said to them: "It is good for you that I am going," correcting not their feelings but their foresight. When he was speaking in the same way about his approaching death, Peter who loved him so dearly, tried to stand in the way. When, as you remember, he rebuked him, what was it but his imprudence that he was correcting? Finally what did he mean in saying: "You do not mind the things of God," except: you do not love wisely, you are following your human feeling in opposition to the divine plan. He even called him Satan because although it was in ignorance, he was impeding salvation in trying to prevent the Savior's death. Peter, who had been corrected, later when the sad prophecy was repeated, no longer objected to death but promised he would die with him. But he could not fulfill this promise because he had not yet reached that third degree where he would love with all his strength. Taught to love with his whole soul, Peter was still weak. He was well instructed but not well prepared, aware of the mystery but afraid of bearing witness to it. Obviously that love was not as strong as death which still yielded before it. Later, robed with strength from on high according to the promise of Jesus Christ, Peter began to love with such strength that when forbidden by the Council to proclaim the holy Name, he boldly answered those who gave the order: "We must obey God rather than men." Then finally he attained the fullness of love, when for love's sake he would not spare even his own life. Truly "greater love than this no man has, than that he lay down his life for his friends." Even if Peter did not actually surrender his life then, he did offer it.

So then, to love with your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole strength means not being led astray by allurements, or seduced by lies, or broken by injuries.

6. Notice that the love of the heart is, in a certain sense, carnal, because our hearts are attracted most toward the humanity of Christ and the things he did or commanded while in the flesh. The heart that is filled with this love is quickly touched by every word on this subject. Nothing else is as pleasant to listen to, or is read with as much interest, nothing is as frequently in remembrance or as sweet in reflection. The soul prepares the holocausts of its prayers with this love



as if they were the fattened offerings of bullocks. The soul at prayer should have before it a sacred image of the God-man, in his birth or infancy or as he was teaching, or dying, or rising, or ascending. Whatever form it takes this image must bind the soul with the love of virtue and expel carnal vices, eliminate temptations and quiet desires. I think this is the principal reason why the invisible God willed to be seen in the flesh and to converse with men as a man. He wanted to recapture the affections of carnal men who were unable to love in any other way, by first drawing them to the salutary love of his own humanity, and then gradually to raise them to a spiritual love. Were they not at just this level when they said: "See, we have left everything and have followed you"? It was only by the love of his physical presence that they had left everything. They could not even bear to hear a word of his approaching passion and death, although this was to be their salvation. Even after it had all happened they could not gaze upon the glory of his ascension without deep sorrow. This is why Christ said to them: "Because I have said this to you sadness has filled your hearts." So it was only by his physical presence that their hearts were detached from carnal loves.

7. Afterwards he showed them a higher degree of love when he said, "It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing." I think Paul had reached this level when he said: "Even if we once knew Christ in the body, we know him thus no longer." Perhaps this was also true of the Prophet who said: "A Spirit before our face is Christ the Lord." When he adds: "Under his shadow we will live among the heathens," he seems to me to speak on behalf of the beginners, in order that they may at least rest in the shade since they know they are not strong enough to bear the heat of the sun. They may be nourished by the sweetness of his humanity since they are not yet able to perceive the things which are of the Spirit of God. The shade of Christ, I suggest, is his flesh which over shadowed Mary and tempered for her the bright splendor of the Spirit. Therefore in this human devotion there is in the meantime consolation for whomever does not as yet have the Spirit which gives life, at least who do not have him in the same way as those who say: "A Spirit before our face is Christ the Lord," and again: "If we once knew Christ in the flesh we know him thus no longer." For there is no love of Christ at all without the Holy Spirit, even if this love is in the flesh, and without its fullness. The measure of such love is this: its sweetness seizes the whole heart, and draws it completely from the love of all flesh and every sensual pleasure. Really this is what it means to love with the whole heart. If I prefer to the humanity of my Lord someone joined to me by ties of blood, or some sensual pleasure, this would obviously prove that I do not love with my whole heart since

it is divided between its own interests and the love of the one who taught me as a man, both by his words and examples. Would I not seem to give my love partly to him and partly to my own? As he once said: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." To put it briefly, to love with the whole heart means to put the love of his sacred humanity before everything that tempts us, from within or without. Among these temptations we must also count the glory of the world, because its glory is that of the flesh, and those who delight in it without a doubt are men of the flesh.

8. Of course this devotion to the humanity of Christ is a gift, a great gift of the Spirit. I have called it carnal with comparison to that other love which does not know the Word as flesh so much as the Word as wisdom, as justice, truth, holiness, loyalty, strength, and whatever else could be said in this manner. Christ is truly all these things. "He became for us the wisdom of God, and justice, and sanctification and redemption." Take as an example two men one of them feels a share in Christ's sufferings, is affected and easily moved at the thought of all that he suffered; he is nourished and strengthened by the sweetness of this devotion to good and honest and worthy actions. But the other is always aflame with zeal for justice, eager for the truth and for wisdom. His life, his habits are saintly, ashamed of boasting, avoiding criticism, never knowing envy, hating pride. He not only flees all human glory but shrinks from it and avoids it, every stain of impurity both in body and soul he loathes and eradicates; finally he spurns every evil as if naturally, and embraces what is good. If you would compare the feelings of these two men would it not appear how the latter was superior in respect to the former, whose love was somehow more carnal?

9. But that carnal love is worthwhile since through it sensual love is excluded, and the world is condemned and conquered. It becomes better when it is rational, and becomes perfect when it is spiritual. Actually it is rational when the reason is so strong in faith that in all things concerning Christ it strays in not even the slightest degree because of any false likeness of truth, nor by any heretical or diabolical deceit does it wander from the integrity of the sense of the Church. In the same way when speaking on its own it exercises such caution as never to exceed the proper limits of discretion by superstition or frivolity or the vehemence of a too eager spirit. This is loving God with the whole soul, as we said before. If, with the help of the Spirit, the soul attains such strength that it remains steadfast no matter what the effort or difficulty, if the fear of death itself cannot make it act

unjustly, but even then it loves with the whole strength, this then is spiritual love. I think the name is very fitting for this special love because of the special fullness of the Spirit in which it excels. This is enough for those words of the bride: "Therefore the young maidens love you so much." In those things that are to follow may he open to us the treasure of his mercy, the one who guards them, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 21 THE LOVE OF THE BRIDE, THE CHURCH, FOR CHRIST**

"Draw me after you; we shall run in the odor of your ointments." What does this mean? Is the bride an unwilling lover, even of her Bridegroom? Does she have to be drawn to him because she lacks freedom to follow him? But not everyone drawn is reluctant to be drawn. Invalids and people in frail health who find walking difficult do not object to being carried to the bath or to a meal, but a criminal will not enjoy being taken to court or to the scaffold. She who asks to be drawn wills to be drawn; she would not have asked if she possessed the power to follow her loved one of her own free will. But why should she be unable? Must we understand that the bride is weak? If one of the maidens complained of weakness and asked to be drawn, it would not have surprised us. But the bride herself who was so strong and healthy that she seemed able to draw others -- is it not hard to believe that she herself needs to be drawn like a person sick or indisposed? Is it possible to regard any person as strong and healthy if we apply the term weak to one who is named bride of the Lord because of her unique perfection and peerless virtue? Is it perhaps the Church who spoke these words as her eyes followed the ascent of her Bridegroom into heaven, filled with desire to follow him and be assumed with him into glory? For no matter how great the perfection to which one attains, as long as one is burdened with this mortal body, as long as one is confined in the prison of this evil world, cramped by necessities and tormented by sinful urges, the contemplation of sublime truths can be achieved only little by little and in weariness of spirit; one is certainly not free to follow the Bridegroom wherever he goes. And so we have that tearful cry of the distressed heart: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death?" Hence too that supplication: "Free me from this imprisonment." Even the bride herself may repeat out of her distress: "Draw me after you; for a perishable body presses down the soul, and this tent of clay

weighs down the active mind." Does she say this because she wants "to be gone and to be with Christ," especially since she sees that those for whom she might have felt it necessary to continue her earthly life, are making definite progress in the love of the Bridegroom, and safely grounded in charity? She had already referred to this when she said: "Therefore the maidens love you beyond measure." Now she would seem to say: "See, the maidens love you, and this love binds them to you firmly; they no longer have any need of me, there is no longer any reason for me to continue living in this life;" and so she says: "Draw me after you."

2. This is what I should have thought if she had said: "Draw me to you."

But because she says "after you," she seems rather to appeal for the grace to follow the example of his way of life, to emulate his virtue, to hold fast to a rule of life similar to his and achieve some degree of his self-control. This is a work for which she needs all possible aid in order to deny herself, take up her cross, and follow Christ. Here surely the bride needs to be drawn, and drawn by no other than he who said: "Without me you can do nothing." "I know," she says, "that I have no hope of joining you except by walking after you; and even in this I am helpless unless helped by you. Therefore I entreat you to draw me after you. Happy the man whose help is from you. He prepared in his heart in this valley of tears his going up, to attain to union with you one day in the mountains where joys abound. How few there are, Lord, who wish to follow you, and yet there is not one who does not wish to reach you, because all know that at your right hand are everlasting pleasures. All men therefore wish to enjoy you, but not to the extent of following your example; they will reign with you but not suffer with you. One of these said: 'May I die the death of the just! May my end be one with theirs!' He wanted his last days to resemble those of the just, but not the years of early manhood. Even worldly men who know that a saint's death is an event dear to God want to die with the dispositions of spiritual men whose holy lives repel them; for 'when sleep comes to the loved ones, the Lord's heritage is at hand.' 'Happy are those who die in the Lord' but on the contrary, in the Prophet's words: 'The death of the wicked is an evil one.' They are not concerned to search for the Lord though they should like to find him; they want to get to him without following him. Not so those to whom Christ said: 'You are the men who have stood by me faithfully in my trials.' Happy those, dear Jesus, who are privileged to have you as their witness. They followed after you in very truth, with their feet and with their hearts. You have revealed to them the paths of life, calling them after you

because you are the way and the life. 'Follow me,' you said, 'and I will make you fishers of men;' and again: 'If a man serves me he must follow me; wherever I am, my servant will be there too.' And hence that ring of triumph in their words: 'See, we have left everything and followed you.'

3. "So too with the one you love. For your sake she has left all things, eager always to journey after you, ever to walk in your footsteps, to follow you wherever you go." She knows that your ways are delightful ways, that your paths all lead to contentment, that anyone who follows you will not walk in darkness. She requests, however, to be drawn, because 'your righteousness is like the mountains of God,' and she cannot attain to it of her own strength. She requests to be drawn because she knows that no one comes to you unless your Father draws him. But those whom the Father draws are drawn also by you, for whatever works the Father does the Son does too. There is a more intimate note however about her request to be drawn by the Son, for he is her Bridegroom, sent before her by the Father as leader and teacher. He would be the exemplar of her moral life, preparing the way of virtue; he would teach her to become like himself, and share with her his prudence; and having thus given her the law of life and discipline, he would inevitably be attracted by her beauty.

4. " 'Draw me after you; we shall run in the odor of your ointment.' It is indeed necessary that we be drawn, because the fire of your love has quickly cooled within us. We cannot run now, because of this cold, as we did in former days. But we shall run again when you restore to us the joy of knowing you are our Savior, when the benign warmth of grace will have returned with the renewed shining of the Sun of Justice. The troubles that hide him from us like clouds will then pass, the soft breath of the caressing breeze will melt the ointments and the perfumes will rise to fill the air with their sweet odor. Then we shall run, run with eagerness where the wafted perfumes draw us. The lethargy that now numbs us will vanish with the return of fervor, and we shall no longer need to be drawn; stimulated by the perfumes we shall run of our own accord. But now again, draw me after you."

Thus you see that he who is guided by the Spirit does not always remain in the same state. He does not always advance with the same facility. "The course of man is not in his control." It rather depends on the guidance of the Spirit who sets the pace as he pleases, sometimes torpidly, sometimes blithely, teaching him to forget the past and to strain ahead for what is still to come. If you have been attentive I think you will have seen that your inward experience re-echoes what I

have outwardly described.

5. Therefore when you feel weighed down by apathy, lukewarmness and fatigue, do not yield to cowardice or cease to study spiritual truths, but look for the hand of the one who can help you, begging like the bride, to be drawn, until finally, under the influence of grace, you feel again the vigorous pulse of life. Then you will run and shout out: "I run the way of your commandments since you have enlarged my heart." But while this state of happiness remains, you must not use it as if you possessed God's gift by right of inheritance, secure in the conviction that you could never lose it; for if he should suddenly withdraw his hand and withhold his gift, you would be plunged into dejection and excessive unhappiness. When you feel happy beware of boasting: "Nothing can ever shake me!" For you may be compelled to repeat for yourself the Psalmist's sad comment: "But then you hid your face and I was terrified." If you are wise you will try to follow the advice of the Wise Man: "in the time of adversity not to be unmindful of prosperity, and in the time of prosperity not to be forgetful of adversity."

6. Do not, then, pin your hopes on ephemeral well-being, but cry to God like the Prophet and say: "Do not desert me when my strength is failing." Be consoled in the time of trial and say with the bride: "Draw me after you; we shall run in the odor of your ointments." This will keep your hopes buoyant in times of hardship, and give you foresight when fortune favors you. You will ride above the vicissitudes of good and evil times with the poise of one sustained by values that are eternal, with that enduring, unshakeable equanimity of the man of faith who thanks God in every circumstance. So even amid the fluctuating events and inevitable shortcomings of this giddy world you will ensure for yourself a life of durable stability, provided you are renewed and reformed according to the glorious and original plan of the eternal God, the likeness of him in whom there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow of a change. Even in this world you will become as he is: neither dismayed by adversity nor dissolute in prosperity. Living thus, this noble creature, made to the image and likeness of his Creator, indicates that even now he is re-acquiring the dignity of that primal honor, since he deems it unworthy to be conformed to a world that is waning. Instead, following Paul's teaching, he strives to be reformed by the renewal of his mind, aiming to achieve that likeness in which he knows he was created. And as is proper, this purpose of his compels the world itself, which was made for him, to become conformed to him by an admirable change of relationship, according as

all things in their true and natural form begin to co-operate for his good. They become aware of the Lord for whose service they were created, and shed every trace of degeneracy.

7. For this reason the words uttered by God's Only Begotten Son about himself: "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all things to myself," can also be true of all his brothers, all those whom the Father "foreknew and predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brothers." And therefore if even I be lifted up from the earth, I say unflinchingly that I shall draw all things to myself. For it is not rash for me to make my Brother's words my own if I have put on his likeness. If this be true, the rich of this world must not imagine that because Christ said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," that the brothers of Christ possess heavenly gifts only. If the promise mentions only heavenly things, it does not follow that these alone are meant. They do possess earthly things, but with the spirit of men who possess nothing; in reality they possess all things, not like unhappy beggars who get what they beg for, but as masters, masters in the best sense because devoid of avarice. To the man of faith the whole world is a treasure-house of riches: the whole world, because all things, whether adverse or favorable, are of service to him; they all contribute to his good.

8. The miser hungers like a beggar for earthly possessions, the man of faith has a lordly independence of them. The first is a beggar no matter what he owns, the latter by his very independence is a true owner. Ask any man whose heart is insatiably bent on earthly riches what he thinks of those who, by selling their possessions and giving the proceeds to the poor, bartered their earthly goods for the kingdom of heaven. Did they do wisely or not? Almost certainly he will say: "Wisely." Then ask him why he in turn does not practice what he approves of. He will answer: "I cannot." And why? Simply because avarice is his mistress and will not allow it; he is not free because the things he seems to possess are not his own, he is not his own master. "If they are really yours, spend them profitably and exchange earthly goods for those of heaven. If you cannot, then admit that you are not the master of your money but its slave; a caretaker, not an owner. In short you adapt yourself to your purse like a slave to his mistress; he must be happy when she is happy, sad when she is sad. And you: when your purse swells your mood expands, when it grows slack you are deflated. When it is empty you are crushed with misery; when it is full you melt with joy, or rather

become puffed up with pride." Such is the miser.

We, however, must be more concerned to imitate the liberty and constancy of the bride who, well taught on every topic, her heart schooled in wisdom, knows how to handle riches and how to suffer want. When she asks to be drawn she shows that she stands in need not of money but of strength. But since she is consoled by the hope that grace will return to her, she proves that despite her need she is not disheartened.

9. Let her say then: "Draw me after you; we shall run in the odor of your ointments." Where is the wonder that she needs drawing who chases after a giant, striving to catch him as he goes "leaping on the mountains, bounding over the hills"? "His word runs swiftly." She is not able to match his running, cannot compete in swiftness with him "who exults like a giant to run his race;" it is beyond her own strength, so she asks to be drawn. "I am tired," she says, "I grow weak; do not desert me, draw me after you or I shall begin to stray after strange lovers, I shall be running aimlessly. Draw me after you, for it is better that I be drawn by you, that you use any force you please against me, terrifying me with threats or harassing me with scourges, rather than spare my lukewarmness and abandon me to false security. Draw me even against my will, and make me docile; draw me despite my indolence and make me run. A day will come when I shall not need to be drawn, when we shall run with a will and with all speed. For I shall not be running alone even though I ask that I alone be drawn: the maidens will be running with me. We shall run at equal pace, we shall run together, I in the odor of your ointments, they under the stimulus of my example and encouragement, and hence all of us running in the odor of your ointments." The bride has her followers just as she is the follower of Christ, so she does not speak in the singular: "I run," but: "we shall run."

10. But the question comes up: why did she not include the maidens along with herself when she asked to be drawn? Why did she say "draw me" and not "draw us"? Does she have need to be drawn and the maidens do not? O beautiful, O happy, O blessed one, explain to us the meaning of this distinction. "Draw me", she says. "Why 'me,' and not 'us'? Do you envy us this favor? Surely not. You would not have mentioned so soon that the maidens would run with you if you had wished to travel alone after the Bridegroom. If therefore you intended to add 'we shall run' in the plural, why did you formulate in the singular the request to be drawn? She answers: "Charity demanded this. Learn from me by means of these



words to expect a twofold help from above in the course of your spiritual life: correction and consolation. One controls the exterior, the other works within; the first curbs arrogance, the latter inspires trust; the first begets humility, the latter strengthens the faint-hearted; the first makes a man discreet, the latter devout. The first imbues us with fear of God, the latter tempers that fear with the joy of salvation, as the words of Scripture indicate: 'Let my heart rejoice that it may fear your name;' and 'Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice before him with reverence.'

11. "We are drawn when we are tested by temptations and trials; we run when inwardly suffused by consolations, breathing in the ointment-scented air. Therefore when I encounter what is hard and austere I confine it to myself, being strong and healthy and perfect, and I speak in the singular: 'Draw me.' What is pleasant and sweet I share with you, the weak one, and I say: 'We shall run.' I know quite well that girls are delicate and tender, ill-equipped to endure temptations; so I want them to run in my company, but not to be drawn in my company. I will have them as companions in hours of consolation, but not in times of trial. Why so? Because they are frail, and I fear they may tire and lag behind. It is me that you must correct, my Bridegroom" she says, "me that you must test, put on trial and draw after you, because I am ready for the lash and strong enough to persevere. Apart from that we shall run together; I alone shall be drawn, together we shall run. So let us run and run, but in the odor of your ointments, not by trusting in our own worth. We pin our hopes for the race, not in the durability of our powers but in the abundance of your mercies. For although when we ran we did so willingly, it depended not upon man's will or exertion but upon God's mercy. Let mercy but return and we shall run again. You with your giant's power can, run with your own strength; we can run only when your ointments breathe their scent. You whom the Father has anointed 'with the oil of gladness above your fellows,' run by virtue of that anointing; we run in the odor it diffuses. You enjoy the fullness, we the fragrance."

This should be the time to fulfill a promise about the ointments of the Bridegroom that I recall having made to you so long ago, but the length of this sermon forbids it. It must be postponed, for the exalted nature of the theme will not brook the distortion of an abbreviated treatment. Pray therefore to the Lord who confers this anointing, that he may bless the instructions that I so willingly impart, that I may fill your desires with the memory of the generous kindness of him who is the Church's Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **SERMON 22 ON THE FOUR OINTMENTS OF THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE FOUR CARDINAL VIRTUES**

If the ointments of the bride are as precious and exquisite as you have heard them portrayed, how matchless must those of the Bridegroom be! And though any exposition of mine will fail to do justice to them, we must accept that their power is great and their grace efficacious, since their odor alone is enough to make not only the maidens but even the bride run. As you notice, she has not dared to make any such promise about her own ointments. She does indeed rejoice that they are flawless; but she does not say that they have inspired her to run, or that they will do so. This she attributes solely to the Bridegroom's ointments. But if the merest fragrance of these so excites her that she must run, what would the consequences be if she should experience the ointment itself being poured out in her? What wonder if she should even fly! But some of you must want to say: "Desist now from praising these gifts. When you begin to explain them we shall see clearly enough what they are." But no. I make no such promise. For believe me, I have not as yet decided whether I ought to express all the thoughts that suggest themselves. My opinion is that the Bridegroom has a varied and plentiful stock of perfumes and ointments. Some are solely for the pleasure of the bride who enjoys more intimate and familiar relations with him: others are wafted out to the maidens; and others again reach out to strangers afar off, so that "nothing can escape his heat." For although "the Lord is good to all," he is especially kind to those who live in his house, and the more one is assimilated to him by a virtuous life and an upright will, the more sensitive I think he will be to the fragrance of the newer perfumes and the sweeter ointments.

2. In matters of this kind, understanding can follow only where experience leads, and I shall be the last to intrude rashly where the bride alone may enter. The Bridegroom knows the delights with which the Holy Spirit charms the one he loves, the inspirations with which he reanimates her affections, the perfumes that enhance her loveliness. Let her be as a fountain entirely his own, unshared by any stranger, untouched by unworthy lips: for she is "a garden enclosed, a sealed fountain," though rivulets flow from it into the streets. These I may use, though I want no trouble or ingratitude from anyone if I offer what I draw from a public source. I shall even pay myself a mild compliment in this matter, for no

small effort and fatigue are involved in going out day by day to draw waters from the open streams of the Scriptures and provide for the needs of each of you, so that you may have at hand spiritual waters for every occasion, for washing, for drinking, for cooking of foods. God's word is a water of the wisdom that saves; when you drink it you are made clean, as the Lord himself points out: "You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you." The word of God, winged with the Holy Spirit's fire, can cook the raw reflections of the sensual man, giving them a spiritual meaning that feeds the mind, and inspiring him to say: "My heart became hot within me, and as I meditated a fire burst forth."

3. Far from disapproving of those whose purer mind enables them to grasp more sublime truths than I can present, I warmly congratulate them, but expect them to allow me to provide a simpler doctrine for simpler minds. How I wish that all had the gift of teaching: I should be rid of the need to preach these sermons! It is a burden I should like to transfer to another, or rather I should prefer that none of you would need to exercise it, that all would be taught by God, and I should have leisure to contemplate God's beauty. Now however I must confess, not without tears, that I have no time to seek after God, much less to contemplate him; no time to see the king in his beauty seated upon the Cherubim, on a throne raised aloft; to see him in that form in which, as the Father's equal, he was born before the dawning amid the sacred splendors. This is the form in which the angels long to contemplate him forever, God with God; and I, a man, describe him to men according to the human form that he adopted in order to reveal himself with the maximum of esteem and love; "made lower than the angels," he came out of his chambers like a Bridegroom and pitched a tent in the sun. I present him as attractive rather than sublime, as God's appointed servant and not a remote deity, as the one whom the Spirit of the Lord anointed and sent "to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken, to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; to proclaim a year favorable to the Lord."

4. Every person, therefore, is free to pursue the thoughts and experiences, however sublime and exquisite, that are his by special insight, on the meaning of the Bridegroom's ointments. For my part, I offer for the common good what I have received from a common source. He is the fountain of life, a sealed fountain, brimming over from within the enclosed garden through the pipe of St Paul's mouth. This is that true wisdom which Job says, "is drawn out of secret places," divides into four streams and flows into the streets, where it indicates to us him who has been made by God "wisdom and righteousness, and holiness,

and redemption." From these four streams as from priceless perfumes -- there is nothing to prevent us seeing them either as water or as perfume, water because they cleanse, perfume because of their scent -- from these four as from priceless perfumes blended from heavenly ingredients "upon the spicy mount so sweet an odor fills the nostrils of the Church, that she is roused even to the four corners of the earth by its sheer delightfulness. She hurries to meet her heavenly Bridegroom, like the Queen of the South who hastened from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, drawn by his fame as by a sweet scent.

5. The Church was devoid of the power to run in the odor of her Solomon until he who from all eternity was the Wisdom begotten of the Father, became Wisdom from the Father for her in time, and so enabled her to perceive his odor. Thus he has become for her righteousness and holiness and redemption, that she might run in the odor of these gifts too, since these also were equally in him before all things began. "In the beginning was the Word," but the shepherds hurried to see him only when his human birth was announced. Then it was that they said to each other: "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this word that was made, which the Lord has made known to us." Scripture adds that "they came in haste." Before that, while the Word remained solely with God, they did not stir. But when the Word, which was, was made, when the Lord accomplished this and revealed it, then they came with haste, they ran. And therefore, just as the Word was in the beginning, but with God, so, when he began to live among men he was made. Even in the beginning he was wisdom and righteousness and holiness and redemption, but only for the angels; in order that he might become so to men as well, the Father made him all these things because he is the Father. Therefore it says he became our Wisdom from God. It does not say merely that he became Wisdom, but that he became Wisdom for us, because all that he was to the angels he became in turn to us.

6. But you will say: "I cannot see how he could have brought redemption to the angels. The Scriptures give no grounds for thinking that they were ever the captives of sin or doomed to death," and therefore in need of liberation, excepting only those who incurred the incurable sin of pride, and afterwards could not merit to be redeemed. If therefore the angels were never set at liberty, some not needing it because they never fell, others not meriting it because fallen irrevocably, on what grounds do you say that Christ the Lord is their redemption? Listen for a moment. He who raised up fallen man and freed him from slavery, enabled the angels not to fall by guarding them from slavery. Thus he was

equally the liberator of both, providing release for one, protection for the other. It is clear then that just as the Lord Christ was righteousness and wisdom and holiness for the angels, so too he was their redemption; it is also clear that he was made flesh with these four gifts for the sake of men, who can contemplate the invisible things of God only by studying the things he has made. All that he was for the angels, he became for us. What? Wisdom and righteousness, and holiness and redemption: wisdom in preaching, righteousness in forgiving of sins, holiness in social contacts with sinners and redemption in the passion he endured for sinners. When therefore he was made these by God, then the Church perceived the odor, then it ran.

7. Take note therefore of the fourfold anointing, recognize the superabundant and indescribable sweetness of him whom the Father has anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. You lived, O man, in darkness and the shadow of death through ignorance of the truth; you were a prisoner and your sins were your shackles. He came down to you in your prison, not to torture you but to liberate you from the power of darkness. And first of all, as the Teacher of Truth, he banished the murk of your ignorance by the light of his wisdom. By "the righteousness that comes of faith, he loosed the bonds of sin, justifying the sinners by his free gift. By this twofold favor he fulfilled those words of David: "The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind." Furthermore, by living holily in the midst of sinners he laid down a pattern of life that is a pathway back to the fatherland. As a supreme gesture of love he surrendered himself to death and from his own side produced the price of satisfaction that would placate his Father, thus clearly making his own the verse: "It is with the Lord that mercy is to be found, and a generous redemption." Utterly generous, for not a mere drop but a wave of blood flowed unchecked from the five wounds of his body.

8. What should he have done for you and has not done? He gave sight to the blind, set captives free, led the wanderers back, reconciled sinners. Who would not run spontaneously and eagerly after him who sets men free from error, overlooks their blundering, bestows merits by his mode of life and acquires rewards for them by his death? What excuse can anyone have for not running in the fragrance of your perfumes, except that the fragrance has not reached him? But the fragrance of your life has gone into every land, because "the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord," and his compassion is over all that he has made." Therefore the man who fails to perceive this life-giving fragrance that

permeates all places, and does not run on that account, must be dead or even corrupt. Fragrance signifies fame. When the fragrance of his fame arrives it excites men to run, it leads to the experience of inward grace, to the reward of vision. The joyous throng who attain to it shout all together: "As we have heard so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts." If we run after you, Lord Jesus, it is entirely because of the meekness associated with your name, because you do not spurn the poor nor recoil from the sinner. You did not reject the repentant thief, the weeping sinner, the importunate Canaanite woman, the woman caught in adultery, the man who sat at the customs house, the humble tax collector, the disciple who denied you, the man who persecuted your followers, even those who crucified you. We run in the fragrance that these diffuse. The fragrance of your wisdom comes to us in what we hear, for if anyone needs wisdom let him but ask of you and you will give it to him. It is well known that you give to all freely and ungrudgingly. As for your justice, so great is the fragrance it diffuses that you are called not only just but even justice itself, the justice that makes men just. Your power to make men just is measured by your generosity in forgiving. Therefore the man who through sorrow for sin hungers and thirsts for justice, let him trust in the One who changes the sinner into a just man, and, judged righteous in terms of faith alone, he will have peace with God. Your holiness, for its part, is sweetly and richly radiated not only by your mode of life, but even by your conception. You have neither committed sin nor been contaminated by it. Repentant sinners therefore who wish to attain to that holiness essential for the vision of God, should listen to your warning: "Be holy, for I am holy." Let them pay attention to your ways for you are just in all your ways and holy in all your doings. Finally, how many are inspired to run by the sweet odor of your redemption! When you are lifted up from the earth you draw all things to yourself. Your Passion is the ultimate refuge, a remedy that is unique. When our wisdom lets us down, when our righteousness falls short, when the merits of our holiness founder, your Passion becomes our support. Who would presume that his own wisdom, or righteousness or holiness suffices for salvation? "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God." Therefore when my strength is spent I shall not be troubled, I shall not lose heart. I know what I shall do: I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. Enlighten my eyes, O Lord, that I may learn what is pleasing to you at all times, and then I am wise. "Remember not the sins of my youth, or my transgressions," and then I am righteous. "Teach me your way," and then I am holy. And yet, unless your blood cries out on my behalf, I am not saved. To obtain all these gifts we run after you: forgive us, because we cry after you.

9. All of us do not run with equal ardor in the fragrance of all the perfumes; some are more eager for the study of wisdom, others concentrate on doing penance in the hope of pardon, others again are inspired to practice the virtues by the example of Christ's life and behavior, while yet others are roused to fervor more by the memory of his Passion. Is it possible for us to find examples of each kind? Those ran in the fragrance of wisdom who had been sent by the Pharisees and returned to them saying: "No man ever spoke like this man!" They admired his doctrine and praised his wisdom. Nicodemus also was lured into running by this fragrance when he came to Jesus by night, in the clear light of his wisdom, and went back reformed, instructed in many things. Mary Magdalene ran in the fragrance of justice: many sins were forgiven her because she loved much. She had ceased to be the sinner taunted by the Pharisee, and become a virtuous and holy woman. He did not realize that righteousness or holiness is a gift of God, not the fruit of man's effort, and that the man "to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity" is not only just but blessed. Had he forgotten how the Lord had cured his or some other man's bodily leprosy with a touch without contracting it? So, when the just One is touched by the sinner, he imparts rather than loses righteousness, nor is he tarnished with the stain of the sin from which he cleanses her. The tax collector ran in similar fashion; and justice himself bears witness that after he had humbly implored forgiveness for his sins, he "went home again at rights with God." Peter ran when, after his fall, he wept bitterly to wash away his sin and be restored to righteousness. David ran when he acknowledged and confessed his crime and was privileged to be told: "The Lord has put away your sin." Paul testifies that he ran in the fragrance of holiness, when he glories in being an imitator of Christ. He said to his followers: "Take me for a model as I take Christ." And all those were running, too, who said: "We have left everything and followed you." It was because of the desire to follow Christ that they had left all things. A general exhortation to everyone to follow in this fragrance is contained in the words: "He who says he abides in Christ ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." Finally, if you wish to hear of those who ran in the fragrance of the Passion, behold all the martyrs. Such, then, is my explanation of the four ointments: the first, wisdom; the second, righteousness; the third, holiness; and the fourth, redemption.

Remember their names and enjoy their fragrance, but forbear to question the manner in which they are made or the number of ingredients they contain. For the knowledge of the nature of the ointments of the Bridegroom cannot be as

easily ascertained by us as was that of the ointments of the bride, that we have previously discussed. For in Christ these are in their fullness, unnumbered and unmeasured. His wisdom is infinite, his righteousness is like the mountains of God, mountains that are eternal, his holiness is unique, his redeeming work inexplicable.

10. It must be remarked too that the wise of this world have multiplied arguments about these four virtues to no purpose; they had no chance of grasping their true meaning, because they knew nothing of him whom God made our wisdom in order to teach us prudence, our righteousness to forgive our sins, our holiness through his example of chaste and temperate living, and our redemption through patience in his resolute acceptance of death. Perhaps one of you will say: "They are all suitably applied except holiness, which seems to bear no proper relation to temperance." To this I answer, first, that temperance and continence imply the same thing. Secondly, scriptural usage identifies continence or cleanliness with holiness. And finally, what else were those frequent rites of sanctification decreed by Moses but purifications consisting of abstinence from food, from drink, from sexual intercourse and similar things? But take special note of the freedom with which the Apostle attributed this meaning to the word holiness: "What God wants is for you all to be holy so that each one of you might know how to possess his body in holiness, not giving way to selfish passion;" and again: "God did not call us into uncleanness, but into holiness. It is clear that he identifies holiness with temperance.

11. Now that I have thrown light on what seemed obscure, I return to the point from which I digressed. What have you to do with righteousness if you are ignorant of Christ, who is the righteousness of God? Where, I ask, is true prudence, except in the teaching of Christ? Or true justice, if not from Christ's mercy? Or true temperance, if not in Christ's life? Or true fortitude, if not in Christ's Passion? Only those can be called prudent who are imbued with his teaching; only those are just who have had their sins pardoned through his mercy; only those are temperate who take pains to follow his way of life; only those are courageous who hold fast to the example of his patience when buffeted by sufferings. Vainly therefore will anyone strive to acquire the virtues, if he thinks they may be obtained from any source other than the Lord of the virtues, whose teaching is the seed-bed of prudence, whose mercy is the well-spring of justice, whose life is a mirror of temperance, whose death is the badge of fortitude. To him be honor and glory for evermore. Amen.



## **SERMON 23 IN THE ROOMS OF THE KING**

“The king has brought me into his rooms.” This is where the fragrance comes from, this is the goal of our running. She had said that we must run, drawn by that fragrance, but did not specify our destination. So it is to these rooms that we run, drawn by the fragrance that issues from them. The bride's keen senses have been quick to detect it, so eager is she to experience it in all its fullness. But first of all we ought to give thought to the meaning of these rooms. To begin with, let us imagine them to be perfume-laden places within the Bridegroom's quarters, where varied spices breathe their scents, where delights are manifold. The more valuable products of garden and field are consigned for preservation to store-rooms like these. To these therefore people run, at least those who are aglow with the Spirit. The bride runs, so do the maidens; but the one to arrive first is the one whose love is most ardent, because she runs more quickly. On arrival she brook no refusal, not even delay. The door is promptly opened to her as to one of the family, one highly esteemed, loved with a special love, uniquely favored. But what of the maidens? They follow at a distance they are still undeveloped, they can neither run with an energy to match that of the bride, nor achieve the ardor of her desire. Consequently they arrive late and remain outside. But the charity of the bride will not allow her to be indifferent, nor does pride in her accomplishments blind her, as it does so many, and cause her to forget them. On the contrary, she consoles them and exhorts them to be patient, to tolerate calmly both the rebuff and her absence. She tells them how great is her happiness, for the sole reason that they may share in her joy, and be inspired with the confidence that they will not at all be excluded from the favors bestowed on their mother. She is never so bent on her own progress as to overlook their interest, nor desirous of promoting her own welfare at their expense. Though the excellence of her merits puts a barrier between them, it is certain that she is always with them through her love and holy solicitude. She has to be thus conformed to her Bridegroom, who ascended into heaven and yet promised to be with his followers on earth until the end of the world. So too with the bride; however great her progress or the graces with which she is endowed, never, whether in her concern for them, in her forethought or in her love, is she separated from those whom she has begotten through the Gospel, never does her heart forget them.

2. She speaks to them therefore as follows: "Be happy, be confident: the King has brought me into his bedroom. You may regard yourselves as introduced too. Even though I alone seem to have been introduced, it is not for my sole advantage. Every preferment I enjoy is a joy for you all; the progress that I make is for you, and with you I shall divide all that I shall merit above your measure." Do you wish for unquestionable proof that these words express her intention and her love? Then listen to their answer: "You will be our joy and gladness." "You," they say, "will be our joy and gladness, for we are not yet fit to rejoice in ourselves." And they go on to say: "remembering your breasts," that is: "We persevere quietly until you come, knowing that you will return to us with overflowing breasts. We are confident that then we shall rejoice and be glad," but meanwhile we keep remembering your breasts." By adding: "more than wine," they reveal that because of their imperfection they are still disturbed by the remembrance of carnal desires, designated by the wine, but that these desires are overcome by recalling the abundant sweetness which, experience assures them, flows from those breasts. Now would be a time to speak about these if I had not done so previously. But now see how the maidens anticipate their own reward in that of their mother, how they regard her recompense and enjoyment as their own, how her admission consoles them for the bitterness of their rebuff. They would never have this confidence if they did not accept her as their mother. Here is a point for the ear of those superiors who wish always to inspire fear in their communities and rarely promote their welfare. Learn, you who rule the earth. Learn that you must be mothers to those in your care, not masters; make an effort to arouse the response of love, not that of fear: and should there be occasional need for severity, let it be paternal rather than tyrannical. Show affection as a mother would, correct like a father. Be gentle, avoid harshness, do not resort to blows, expose your breasts: let your bosoms expand with milk, not swell with passion. Why impose in addition your yoke on those whose burdens you ought rather to carry? Why will the young man, bitten by the serpent, shy away from the judgment of the priest, to whom he ought rather to run as to the bosom of a mother? If you are spiritual, instruct him in a spirit of gentleness, not forgetting that you may be tempted yourselves. Otherwise he shall die in his sin, but, says the Lord, "I will hold you responsible for his death." We shall speak of this again.

3. Since the implications of the text are clear from what I have said, let us now try to discover the spiritual meaning of the storerooms. Further on there is mention of a garden and a bedroom, both of which I join to these rooms for the purpose of

this present discussion. When examined together the meaning of each becomes clearer. By your leave then, we shall search the Sacred Scriptures for these three things, the garden, the storeroom, the bedroom. The man who thirsts for God eagerly studies and meditates on the inspired word, knowing that there he is certain to find the one for whom he thirsts. Let the garden, then, represent the plain, unadorned, historical sense of Scripture, the storeroom its moral sense, and the bedroom the mystery of divine contemplation.

4. For a start I feel that my comparison of scriptural history to a garden is not unwarranted, for in it we find men of many virtues, like fruitful trees in the garden of the Bridegroom, in the Paradise of God. You may gather samples of their good deeds and good habits as you would apples from trees. Who can doubt that a good man is a tree of God's planting? Listen to what St David says of such a man: "He is like a tree that is planted by a stream of water, yielding its fruit in season, and its leaves never fade." Listen to Jeremiah, speaking to the same effect and almost in similar words: "He is like a tree that is planted by a stream of water that thrusts its roots to the stream: when the heat comes it fears not." Likewise the Prophet: "The virtuous flourish like palm trees and grow as tall as the cedars of Lebanon." Of himself he says: "I, for my part, am like an olive tree growing in the house of God." History therefore is a garden in which we may recognize three divisions. Within its ambit we find the creation, the reconciliation, and the renewal of heaven and earth. Creation is symbolized in the sowing or planting of the garden; reconciliation by the germination of what is sown or planted. For in due course, while the heavens showered from above and the skies rained down the just one, the earth opened for a Savior to spring up, and heaven and earth were reconciled. "For he is the peace between us, and has made the two into one," making peace by his blood between all things in heaven and on earth. Renewal however is to take place at the end of the world. Then there will be "a new heaven and a new earth," and the good will be gathered from the midst of the wicked like fruit from a garden, to be set at rest in the storehouse of God. As Scripture says: "In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land raised on high." Here you have the three aspects of time represented by the garden in the historical sense.

5. In its moral teaching too, three things are to be taken into account, three apartments as it were in the one storeroom. It was for this reason perhaps that she used the plural, rooms, instead of room, since she must have been thinking about these apartments. Later on she glories in being admitted to the wine-room.

We therefore, in accord with the advice: "Give occasion to a wise man and he will be still wiser," take occasion from the name given by the Holy Spirit to this room, and give names to the other two: the room of spices and the room of the ointments. Afterwards we shall see the reason for these names. For the moment take note that all these possessions of the Bridegroom are wholesome and sweet: wine, ointments and spices. "Wine," says Scripture, "gladdens the heart of man." We read too that oil gives him a merry countenance, and it is with oil that the various powders are mixed to produce ointments. Spices are useful, not only for the attractive sweetness of their scent, but also for their powers of healing. Rightly then the bride's happiness abounds on being admitted to a place filled to overflowing with such rich graces!

6. But I can give them other names, whose application seems more obvious. Taking them in due order, I name the first room discipline, the second nature, and the third grace. In the first, guided by moral principles, you discover how you are inferior to others, in the second you find the basis for equality, in the third what makes you greater; that is: the grounds for submission, for co-operation, for authority; or if you will: to be subject, to co-exist, to preside. In the first you bear the status of learner, in the second that of companion, in the third that of master. For nature has made all men equal. But since this natural moral gift was corrupted by pride, men became impatient of equal status. Driven by the urge to surpass their fellows, they spared no efforts to achieve this superiority; with an itch for vainglory and prompted by envy, they lived in mutual rivalry. Our primary task is to tame this wilfulness of character by submission to discipline in the first room, where the stubborn will, worn down by the hard and prolonged schooling of experienced mentors, is humbled and healed. The natural goodness lost by pride is recovered by obedience, and they learn, as far as in them lies, to live peacefully and sociably with all who share their nature, with all men, no longer through fear of discipline but by the impulse of love. When they pass from here into the room of nature, they discover what is written: "How good, how delightful it is to live together as one like brothers: fine as oil on the head." For when morals are disciplined there comes, as to spices pounded together, the oil of gladness, the good of nature; the resulting ointment is good and sweet. The man who is anointed with it becomes pleasant and temperate, a man without a grudge, who neither swindles nor attacks nor offends another; who never exalts himself nor promotes himself at their expense, but offers his services as generously as he willingly accepts theirs.

7. If you have adequately grasped the characteristics of these two rooms, I think you will admit that I have appropriately named them the spice room and the ointment room. In the former, just as the vigorous pounding with a pestle presses and extracts the strong fragrance of the spices, so the power of authority and strictness of discipline elicit and reveal the natural strength of good morals. In the latter, a sweet refinement arising from innate and ready affection inspires one to serve with courteous promptitude, like the oil which anoints the head and runs down and flows over the whole body when exposed to a little heat. Accordingly, in the storeroom of discipline, the various dried ingredients of the spicy mixtures are stored up, and hence I thought it ought to be called the room of spices. But because the ointments are stored and preserved ready for use in the storeroom of Nature, it is called the room of ointments. With regard to the wine room, I do not think there is any other reason for its name than that the wine of an earnest zeal for the works of love is found there. One who has not been admitted to this room should never take charge of others. This wine should be the inspiring influence in the lives of those who bear authority, such as we find in the Teacher of the Nations, when he said: "Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to fall and I am not indignant?" Your desire is venal if you hanker to rule over others without the will to serve them; your ambition is unprincipled if you would hold men in subjection without concern for their salvation. I have also named this the room of grace; not because a man may enter the other two without the aid of grace, but because grace is especially found here in its fullness. For "love is the fullness of the law" and if you love your brother you have fulfilled the law.

8. Now that I have given you an explanation of the names, let us see how the rooms differ from each other. To check the petulant, dreamy senses with the fear a superior can inspire, to curb with firm discipline the flesh's immoderate appetites, is by no means as easy or manageable as to live in the harmony of spontaneous affection with our companions; to live agreeably with them at the prompting of the will is different from a life where the rod is the check on manners. No one will maintain that the ability to live sociably and to govern beneficially are of equal importance or demand the same sort of virtue. Hence there are so many living peacefully under a superior who, when freed from their inferior status, are unable to control themselves or refrain from abusing their equals. Lots of men, too, can spend their days uprightly and peacefully among their brothers, but if given authority over them they become not only useless but foolish and unworthy. People of this kind are meant to be content with a moderate measure of goodness, this is their allotted grace from God; they have

little need of guidance from a superior but are not themselves capable of leadership. These latter are endowed with a finer character than those previously referred to as devoid of self-control, but leaders blest with competence surpass them both. They qualify to receive what the Lord has promised to those who govern well; that he will place them over all his possessions. Those who exercise authority for the welfare of others are comparatively few, and fewer still those whose power rests in humility. These both are achieved easily by the man of perfect discretion, the mother of the virtues, the man who is drunk with the wine of charity even to contempt for his own good name, to forgetfulness of self and indifference to self-interest. This is the unique and exquisite lesson of the Holy Spirit infused in the wine room. Without the fervor of charity the virtue of discretion is lifeless, and intense fervor goes headlong without the curb of discretion. Praiseworthy the man then who possesses both, the fervor that enlivens discretion, the discretion that regulates fervor. A man in a position of authority ought to be so constituted. But the man whose character I most admire, who has attained supreme success in the way of life I have portrayed, is the man to whom it is given to sprint through or ramble round all these rooms without stumbling, who never contends with his superiors nor envies his equals, who does not fail in concern for his subjects nor use his authority arrogantly. To be obedient to superiors, obliging to one's companions, to attend with kindness to the needs of one's subjects -- these sure marks of perfection I unhesitatingly attribute to the bride. We infer this from the words she speaks: "The king has brought me into his rooms," which show that she was introduced, not to any room in particular but to the whole complex of rooms.

(Continued)

### **SERMON 23 IN THE ROOMS OF THE KING (continued)**

9. Let us at last enter the bedroom. What can be said of it? May I presume that I know all about it? Far from me the pretension that I have experienced so sublime a grace, nor shall I boast of a privilege reserved solely to the fortunate bride. I am more concerned to know myself, as the Greek motto advises, that with the Prophet, "I may know what is wanting to me." However, if I knew nothing at all there is nothing I could say. What I do know I do not begrudge you or withhold from you; what I do not know may "he who teaches men knowledge" supply to

you. You remember that I said the bedroom of the King is to be sought in the mystery of divine contemplation. In speaking of the ointments I mentioned that many varieties of them are to be found in the Bridegroom's presence, that all of them are not for everybody's use, but that each one's share differs according to his merits; so too, I feel that the King has not one bedroom only, but several. For he has more than one queen; his concubines are many, his maids beyond counting. And each has her own secret rendezvous with the Bridegroom and says: "My secret to myself, my secret to myself." All do not experience the delight of the Bridegroom's private visit in the same room, the Father has different arrangements for each. For we did not choose him but he chose us and appointed places for us; and in the place of each one's appointment there he is too. Thus one repentant woman was allotted a place at the feet of the Lord Jesus, another -- if she really is another -- found fulfillment for her devotion at his head. Thomas attained to this mystery of grace in the Savior's side, John on his breast, Peter in the Father's bosom, Paul in the third heaven.

10. Who among us can see the difference between these various merits, or rather rewards? But in order to draw attention to what is known to us all, I suggest that the first woman took her rest on the secure ground of humility, the second on the seat of hope, Thomas in firm faith, John in the breadth of charity, Paul in the insights of wisdom, Peter in the light of truth. There are many rooms therefore in the Bridegroom's house; and each, be she queen, or concubine or one of the bevy of maidens, finds there the place and destination suited to her merits until the grace of contemplation allows her to advance further and share in the happiness of her Lord, to explore her Bridegroom's secret charms. Relying on the light it may please him to give me, I shall try to demonstrate this more clearly in its proper place. For the moment it suffices to know that no maiden, or concubine, or even queen, may gain access to the mystery of that bedroom which the Bridegroom reserves solely for her who is his dove, beautiful, perfect and unique. Hence it is not for me to take umbrage if I am not admitted there, especially since I can see that even the bride herself is at times unable to find fulfillment of her desire to know certain secrets. At such times she craves to be shown where he pastures his flock, where he rests it at noon.

11. But I shall tell you how far I have advanced, or imagine I have advanced; and you should not accuse me of boasting, because I reveal it solely in the hope of helping you. The Bridegroom who exercises control over the whole universe, has a special place from which he decrees his laws and formulates plans as

guidelines in weight, measure and number for all things created. This is a remote and secret place, but not a place of repose. For although as far as in him lies he arranges all things sweetly -- the emphasis is on arranging and the contemplative who perchance reaches that place is not allowed to rest and be quiet. In a way that is wondrous yet delightful he teases the awe-struck seeker till he reduces him to restlessness. Further on the bride beautifully describes both the delight and the restlessness of this stage of contemplation when she says that though she sleeps her heart is awake. She means that in her sleep she experiences a repose full of sweetest surprise and wondrous peace, but her wakeful heart endures the lassitude of avid desire and laborious effort. Job referred to this when he said: "Lying in bed I wonder, `When will it be day?' Having risen I think, `How slowly evening comes!'" Do you gather from these words that a person in pursuit of holiness sometimes finds sweetness bitter and wants to be rid of it, and at other times finds that same bitterness attractive? For he would not have said: "When will it be day?" if that contemplative repose entirely satisfied him; but if it had been entirely displeasing he would not have longed for the quiet of evening. This place then, where complete repose is not attainable, is not the bedroom.

12. There is another place from which God, the just Judge, "so much to be feared for his deeds among mankind," watches ceaselessly with an attention that is rigorous yet hidden, over the world of fallen man. The awe-struck contemplative sees how, in this place, God's just but hidden judgment neither washes away the evil deeds of the wicked nor is placated by their good deeds. He even hardens their hearts lest they should repent, take stock of themselves, and be converted and he would heal them. And he does this in virtue of a certain and eternal decree, all the more frightening from its being unchangeably and eternally determined. The contemplative's fears are intensified if he recalls God's words to the angels as recorded in the Prophet: "Shall we show favor to the wicked?" And when they ask with dismay: "Will he not, then, learn to do justice?" God answers: "No," and gives the reason: "He does evil in the land of the upright, and he will not see the glory of the Lord." Let the clerics, let the ministers of the Church, who are guilty of impious conduct in their benefices, be filled with fear. Discontented with the stipends that ought to suffice them, they sacrilegiously retain the surplus income that is meant for the upkeep of the needy; they are not afraid to squander the sustenance of the poor in pandering to their own pride and luxury. They are guilty of a double wickedness: they pilfer the property of others and prostitute the goods of the Church to serve their lusts and vanities.



13. Who will want to rest in such a place when he sees that he, whose judgments are like the mighty deep, only spares and shows mercy to these sinners in this life that he may not do so in eternity? This kind of vision inspires a terror of judgment, not the secure confidence of the bedroom. That place is awe-inspiring, and totally devoid of quiet. I am horror-stricken when suddenly pitched into it, and over and over I think on the words: "What man knows whether he deserves love or hate?" What wonder if I should be stumbling there, I who am but a leaf blown in the wind, a sapless stalk, when even the greatest contemplative confessed his feet were on the point of stumbling. He almost slipped, and said: "I envied the wicked, seeing the peace of sinners." Why should he have felt like this? "They do not suffer as other men do, no human afflictions for them! So pride upholds them." Hence they will not stoop to repentance, and are to be damned for their pride with the proud devil and his angels. Those not involved in the toil of men will be involved in the work of the devil. To them the Judge will say: "Go away from me, you cursed, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." However, that is a place where we find God working, it is nothing less than the house of God and the gate of heaven. In it we learn the fear of God, that his name is holy and terrible; it is the anteroom to glory, for "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

14. Do not be surprised that I have assigned the beginning of wisdom to this place and not to the first. For there we listen to Wisdom as a teacher in a lecture hall, delivering an all-embracing discourse, here we receive it within us; there our minds are enlightened, here our wills are moved to decision. Instruction makes us learned, experience makes us wise. The sun does not warm all those for whom it shines; and so, though Wisdom gives light to many to see what they should do, it does not immediately spur them on to action. To know where great wealth is to be found is not the same as possessing it; it is possession, not knowledge, that makes a man rich. And so with God: to know him is one thing, to fear him is another; nor does knowledge make a man wise, but the fear that motivates him. Would you then call him wise who is puffed up by his own knowledge? Who but the most witless would consider those wise who, "although they knew God, did not honor him as God or give thanks to him"? I share the opinion of the Apostle, who did not hesitate to declare their heart foolish. How truly is the fear of the Lord the beginning of wisdom, because the soul begins to experience God for the first time when fear of him takes hold of it, not when knowledge enlightens it. You fear God's justice, you fear his power; and so you experience God as just and powerful because fear of him is itself an experience.

Experience makes a wise man, as knowledge makes a learned man and wealth a rich man. What then of the place first mentioned? It makes one ready for wisdom. There you are prepared, here you are initiated. The preparation lies in knowing things. But a proud conceit easily follows on this knowledge unless repressed by fear, which is rightly called the beginning of wisdom, because from the beginning it is a barrier to foolishness. In the first place we are set on the way to wisdom, here we enter its doors. But neither here nor there does the contemplative find rest, because there he discovers a busied God, here an angry God. Hence you must not look for the bedroom in these places, one of which resembles a teacher's auditorium, the other a bar of justice.

15. But there is a place where God is seen in tranquil rest, where he is neither judge nor Teacher but Bridegroom. To me -- for I do not speak for others -- this is truly the bedroom to which I have sometimes gained happy entrance. Alas! how rare the time, and how short the stay! There one clearly realizes that "the Lord's love for those who fear him lasts forever and forever." It is there that one may happily say: "I am a friend to all who fear you and observe your precepts." God's purpose stands fast, the peace he has planned for those who fear him is without recall. Overlooking their faults and rewarding their good deeds, with a divine deftness he turns to their benefit not only the good they do but even the evil. He alone is happy "whom the Lord accuses of no guilt." There is no one without sin, not even one. "For all have sinned and forfeited God's glory." But "could anyone accuse those that God has chosen?" I ask no further pledge of righteousness if he is on my side whom alone I have offended. If he decrees that a sin is not to be imputed to me, it is as if it never existed. Inability to sin constitutes God's righteousness; God's forgiveness constitutes man's. When I grasped this I understood the truth of the words: "We know that anyone who has been begotten by God does not sin, because a heavenly birth protects him." Heavenly birth is eternal predestination, by which God loved his chosen ones and endowed them with spiritual blessings in his beloved Son before the world was made. Thus appearing before him in his holy place, they would see his power and his glory, and become sharers in the inheritance of the Son to whose image they were to be conformed. I think of such as these as if they had never sinned, because the sins in time do not appear in eternity, for the love of the Father covers a multitude of sins. "Happy is the man whose fault is forgiven, whose sin is blotted out." When I say these words I am suddenly inspired with so great a confidence, filled with such joy, that it surpasses the fear I experienced in the place of horror, that place of the second vision, and I even look upon myself as one of that blessed

band. Would that this moment lasted! Again and again visit me, Lord, in your saving mission; let me see the goodness of your chosen, let me rejoice in the joy of your nation.

16. O place so truly quiet, so aptly called a bedroom where God is not encountered in angry guise nor distracted as it were by cares, but where his will is proved good and desirable and perfect. This is a vision that charms rather than terrifies; that does not arouse an inquisitive restlessness, but restrains it; that calms rather than wearies the senses. Here one may indeed be at rest. The God of peace pacifies all things, and to gaze on this stillness is to find repose. It is to catch sight of the King who, when the crowds have gone after the day-long hearing of cases in his law-courts, lays aside the burden of responsibility, goes at night to his place, and enters his bedroom with a few companions whom he welcomes to the intimacy of his private suite. He is all the more secure the more secluded his place of rest, all the more at ease when his placid gaze sees about him none but well-loved friends. If it should ever happen to one of you to be enraptured and hidden away in this secret place, this sanctuary of God, safe from the call and concern of the greedy senses, from the pangs of care, the guilt of sin and the obsessive fancies of the imagination so much more difficult to hold at bay -- such a man, when he returns to us again, may well boast and tell us: "The King has brought me into his bedroom." Whether this be the same room that makes the bride so jubilant I do not dare to affirm. But it is a bedroom, the bedroom of the King, and of the three that I have described in the three visions, it is the only place where peace reigns. As was clearly shown, in the first there is but a modicum of quiet, in the second none; for in the first God's glorious appearance fires our curiosity to explore deeper truths, and in the second the terror he inspires shatters our weakness. In the third place however, he is neither fearsome nor awe-inspiring, he wills to be found there in the guise of love, calm and peaceful, gracious and meek, filled with mercy for all who gaze on him.

17. This sermon has been so protracted that for your memory's sake I must summarize briefly what I have said about the storeroom, the garden, the bedroom. Remember the three divisions of time, three kinds of merit and three rewards. The times are connected with the garden, the merits with the storeroom, the reward with the threefold contemplation of one who seeks the bedroom. I am satisfied that I have said enough about the storeroom. With regard to the garden and bedroom, if I discover new ideas or feel the need to modify what I have already said, I shall inform you in due course. If not, what has been said must

suffice, not to be repeated lest I make wearisome what has been spoken for the praise and glory of the Church's Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 24 DETRACTION AND MAN'S RIGHTEOUSNESS**

On this third return from Rome, my brothers, a more merciful eye has looked down from heaven and a more serene countenance has smiled on us. The Lion's rage has cooled, wickedness has ceased, the Church has found peace. The reprobate, the man who for almost eight years has bitterly embroiled her in schism, has been brought to nothing in her sight. But have I returned from so great dangers to be useless to you? I have been granted to your desires; I am ready to serve your advancement. Through your merits I am still alive, so I wish to live for your welfare, for your salvation. And because you wish me to continue the sermons I began a while back on the Song of Songs, I gladly acquiesce, thinking it better to resume where I broke off than to commence with something new. But I fear that my mind, alienated all that time from a doctrine so sublime and preoccupied with manifold affairs of much less consequence, may prove inept for the task. But if I give you what I have, then God can take account of my well-meant effort and enable me to give even what I have not. If events should prove otherwise, the fault will lie in the skill, not the will.

2. We ought to begin, if I be not mistaken, with the words: "The righteous love you." Before we begin to explain what this means, let us take a look at its origin, see who spoke it. For we are expected to understand what the author omits to say. Perhaps it is better to assign it to the maidens, as a continuation of their previous conversation. For when they said: "We will exult and rejoice in you as we remember your breasts, more delightful than wine," it is certain they were speaking to their mother; and they continued with the words: "The righteous love you." I think they may have said this because of members of their party who were not of the same mind although they traveled in their company, who insisted on their own way, their lives being neither simple nor sincere. These were filled with envy of their mother's unique glory and took occasion to murmur against her on the grounds that she alone had entered the storehouses. This is the situation described in the Apostle's words: "Danger from false brothers." It is against their reproaches that she is later compelled to justify herself with the answer: "I am black but lovely, daughters of Jerusalem." It is because of these murmurers,

these blasphemers, that the good and the simple, the humble and the meek, try to console the bride by telling her; "The righteous love you." "Do not be disturbed," they say, "by the wicked words of these blasphemers, because the righteous do love you." When we are reviled for doing good by evil-minded men, it is a sweet consolation if the righteous love us. The esteem of the good and the testimony of our conscience make full amends for lying mouths. "My soul glories in the Lord, let the humble hear Let the humble rejoice, he said; let me but please the humble and I shall bear with equanimity whatever the envy of wicked men may fling in my face.

3. I think this to be the meaning of the appendage: "The righteous love you." Nor is it mere fantasy, for in almost any group of young maidens I find some who curiously watch the bride's actions, not to imitate but to disparage them. They are embittered by their elders' good deeds, they feed on what is evil. You may see them walking apart, banding together, sitting in a huddle and immediately unleashing their wanton tongues in odious gossip. They are linked, one to the other, without an air space between them, so great is the desire to smear or listen to the smear. They combine in intimate groups whose end is slander, their unions promote disunion. Among themselves they develop most mischievous friendships, and equally impelled by unanimous malevolence, fete each other in a camaraderie of spite. Herod and Pilate once behaved just like this, for the Gospel says of them that "they became friends with each other that very day," that is, on the day of the Lord's passion. When they meet thus together it is not to eat the Lord's supper, but rather to offer to others "the cup of demons" and to drink of it themselves. They bear on their tongues the virus of death for their fellows, and gladly welcome the death that enters by their own ears. When with prattling mouths and itching ears we busy ourselves in administering the poisoned cup of slander to each other, we fulfill the Prophet's words: "Death has climbed in at our windows." I have no wish to be trapped in the plots of detractors, for the Apostle tells us they are hated by God: "Detractors, hateful to God." God himself through the Psalm confirms this judgment: "Him who slanders his neighbor secretly, I will destroy."

4. No wonder if he should, since this vice is known to assail and victimize more bitterly than the others the love which is God, as you can see for yourselves. For every slanderer first of all betrays that he himself is devoid of love. And secondly, his purpose in slandering can only be to inspire hatred and contempt in his audience for the victim of his slander. The venomous tongue strikes a blow at

charity in the hearts of all within hearing, and if possible kills and quenches it utterly; worse still, even the absent are contaminated by the flying word that passes from those present to all within reach. See how easily and in how short a time this swift-moving word can infect a great multitude of men with its sickly malice. Hence the inspired Prophet said of such: "Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood." Swift with the speed of news that brooks no delay. One man speaks, one word is spoken; but that one word, in one moment, penetrates the ears of the multitude and destroys their souls. For a heart embittered by the poison of envy can use the tongue to broadcast only bitter words, just as the Lord said: "A man's words flow out of what fills his heart." This malady has varying forms. Some will spew out, with barefaced disrespect, any wicked slander that enters their heads; others try to hide an irrepressible evil purpose under the guise of simulated modesty. See the prelude of deep sighs, the mingled gravity and reluctance blazoned on his unhappy face, the downcast eyes and somber tones, as the slanderer tells his tale, all the more persuasive the more the audience believes that he speaks with regret and with sympathy rather than malice. "I am really sorry for him," he says, "because I like him so much, but I could never induce him to set himself right in this matter." "I knew well," says another "that he was guilty of that fault, though I should never have been the one to reveal it. But now that it has been divulged by another I cannot deny that it is true; it pains me to say it, but facts are facts." And he goes on: "It's a great pity, he has so many good qualities; but if we are to be candid, he cannot be excused in this particular thing."

5. I have said my few words about this most deadly vice, so let me return to the theme I set out to explain, and show who are to be understood here as the "righteous." I am sure that nobody here with a right understanding would hold that those who love the bride are being spoken of in regard to physical perfection. It is spiritual righteousness, that of the soul, that must be explained. It is the Spirit who teaches, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. Therefore God made man righteous in his soul, not in the body made of earthly slime. He created him according to his own image and likeness. He is the one of whom you sing: "The Lord our God is righteous, and there is no iniquity in him." God in his righteousness made man righteous like himself, without iniquity, since there is no iniquity in him. Iniquity is a fault in the heart, not in the flesh, and so you should realize that the likeness of God is to be preserved or restored in your spirit, not in the body of gross clay. For "God is a spirit," and those who wish to persevere in or attain to his likeness must enter into their hearts, and apply

themselves spiritually to that work, until "with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord," they "become transfigured into the same likeness, borrowing glory from that glory, as the Spirit of the Lord enables them."

6. God indeed gave man an upright stance of body, perhaps in order that this corporeal uprightness, exterior and of little account, might prompt the inward man, made to the image of God, to cherish his spiritual uprightness; that the beauty of the body of clay might rebuke the deformity of the mind. What is more unbecoming than to bear a warped mind in an upright body? It is wrong and shameful that this body shaped from the dust of the earth should have its eyes raised on high, scanning the heavens at its pleasure and thrilled by the sight of sun and moon and stars, while, on the contrary, the heavenly and spiritual creature lives with its eyes, its

inward vision and affections centered on the earth beneath; the mind that should be feasting on dainties is wallowing in the mire, rolling in the dung like a pig. The body says: "Look on me, my soul, and blush for shame. Blush, my soul, that you have exchanged the divine for a bestial likeness; blush that despite your heavenly origin you now wallow in filth. Created upright and in your Creator's likeness, you received me as a helper like to yourself, at least in bodily uprightness. Whatever way you turn, to God above or to me below -- 'for no man ever hates his own flesh' -- everywhere you encounter reminders of your own beauty, everywhere you find the friendly admonitions that wisdom imparts, intimating the dignity of your state. If I have retained and preserved the prerogative that I received for your sake, why are you not dismayed at losing yours? Why should the Creator continue to behold the loss of his likeness in you, at the same time that he ceaselessly preserves yours in me? All the help due to you from me you have turned to your own disgrace, you abuse my service to you; a brutish and bestial spirit, you dwell unworthily in this human body."

7. Those whose souls are warped in this fashion cannot love the Bridegroom, because they are not friends of the Bridegroom, they belong to this world. Scripture says: "Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Therefore to pursue and enjoy the worldly warps the soul, while, on the contrary, to meditate on or desire the things that are above constitutes its uprightness.

But if this is to be perfect, it must be not only a conviction of the mind, but a habit of life. I shall judge you to be righteous if your opinions are correct and your deeds do not contradict them. For the state of the invisible soul is made known by one's belief and practice. You may consider a man righteous if you prove him just by his work and Catholic by faith. If otherwise, do not hesitate to appraise him as warped. For Scripture says: "If you offer rightly, but do not divide rightly, you have sinned." You offer rightly either of these, faith or good work, however you do not rightly separate one from the other. Be not one who is righteous in offering but unrighteous in dividing. Why should there be a division between your faith and your conduct? It is a wrong division, it destroys your faith, for "faith without good works is dead." The gift you offer to God is dead. For if devotion is the soul of faith, what is faith that does not work through love but a dead corpse? Can you pay due honor to God with a gift that stinks? Can you who murder your faith hope to please him? What becomes of the sacrifice of peace where this cruel discord reigns? What wonder if Cain attacked his brother when he had already slain his own faith? Why be surprised, O Cain, if your gift is refused by him who holds you in contempt? Divided as you are against yourself, it is no surprise that he pays you no heed. If you set your hand to the sacrifice, why yield your mind to envy? You cannot be reconciled with God while at odds with yourself; you do not please him, rather you sin, not yet because of the impious blow but because of the unrighteous division in your life. Though not yet your brother's murderer, you have murdered your own faith. How can you be right when, while raising up your hand to God, your heart is drawn to earth by envy and fraternal hate? How can you be right when your faith is dead, your purpose to kill, your heart empty of devotion and laden with bitterness? There was faith indeed in your act of worship, but faith devoid of love: the offering was right but the division cruel.

8. The death of faith is the departure of love. Do you believe in Christ? Do the works of Christ so that your faith will live; love will animate your faith, deeds will reveal it. Let no earthly preoccupation bend down the mind that is raised on high by faith. If you say you abide in Christ you ought to walk as he walked. But if you seek your own glory, envy the successful, slander the absent, take revenge on those who injure you, this Christ did not do. You profess to know God, yet reject him by your deeds. There is certainly nothing righteous, but plainly impious, in giving Christ your tongue while surrendering your soul to the devil. Listen then to what he says: "That man honors me with his lips, but his heart is far from me." You are obviously not righteous in maintaining this unrighteous division. You



cannot lift a head upwards that is weighed down by the devil's yoke. You have no means at all of raising yourself, for you are held by an evil power. Your iniquities have gone over your head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for you. Iniquity sits upon a talent of lead. You see then that right faith will not make a man righteous unless it is enlivened by love? The man who has no love has no means of loving the bride. But on the other hand, deeds, however righteous, cannot make the heart righteous without faith. Who would call that man righteous who does not please God? But "without faith it is impossible to please God." And God cannot please the man who is not pleasing to him; for if God is pleasing to a man, that man cannot displease God. Furthermore, if God is not pleasing to a man, neither is his bride. How then can he be righteous who loves neither God nor God's Church, to whom is said: "The righteous love you"? If therefore neither faith without good works nor good works without faith suffice for a man's righteousness, we, my brothers, who believe in Christ, should strive to ensure that our behavior and desires are righteous. Let us raise up both our hearts and hands to God, that our whole being may be righteous, our righteous faith being revealed in our righteous actions. So we shall be lovers of the bride and loved by the Bridegroom Jesus Christ our Lord, who is God, blessed for ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 25 WHY THE BRIDE IS BLACK BUT BEAUTIFUL**

I mentioned in the previous sermon that the bride was compelled to give an answer to her envious assailants, who seemed to be physically part of the group of maidens, but alienated from them in spirit. She said: "I am black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem." It would appear that her dark skin is the object of their slanderous taunting. But we cannot help noting her patience and kindness. She not only refrained from hurling back curse for curse, but gave them a friendly answer, calling them daughters of Jerusalem when for their wickedness she might properly have called them daughters of Babylon, or daughters of Baal, or any other disreputable name. She had learned from the Prophet, and from Christ himself, the teacher of gentleness, that the crushed reed must not be broken nor the wavering flame be quenched. Hence she decided not to provoke to further outbursts people who had already so upset themselves, nor to add fuel to the fires of envy that tormented them. Conscious of her obligation even to the foolish, she took pains to be peaceful with those who hated peace. She preferred therefore to soothe them with a kind word, because she felt it her duty to labor for the salvation of the weak rather than gratify personal spite.

2. Perfection of this kind is commendable for all, but is the model for prelates who wish to be worthy. Good and faithful superiors know that they have been chosen, not for the vain prestige of holding office, but to take care of ailing souls. And when they detect the presence of inward discontent by the voicing of complaints, even to the point of insult and contumely, they must see themselves then as physicians, not masters, and rather than retaliate, prepare a medicine for the fevered mind. This is why the bride addressed the scornful and malevolent maidens as daughters of Jerusalem; her soothing words would captivate the malcontents, calm their anger and banish their envy. It is written: "A peaceful tongue appeases strife." Nor did she give them a false name, for in a certain sense these are truly daughters of Jerusalem. For whether because of the sacraments of the Church which they carelessly receive with the good, or because of a communal profession of faith, or the bodily unity of all the faithful, or even the hope of future salvation from which they are never wholly excluded as long as they live and of which they must not despair here below however recklessly they live, they are not unfittingly called daughters of Jerusalem.

3. Let us next examine what was meant by saying: "I am black but beautiful." Is this a contradiction in terms? Certainly not. These remarks of mine are for simple persons who have not learned to distinguish between color and form; form refers to the shape of a thing, blackness is a color. Not everything therefore that is black is on that account ugly. For example blackness in the pupil of the eye is not unbecoming; black gems look glamorous in ornamental settings, and black locks above a pale face enhance its beauty and charm. You may easily verify this in any number of things, for instances abound in which you will find beautiful shapes with disagreeable colors. And so the bride, despite the gracefulness of her person, bears the stigma of a dark skin, but this is only in the place of her pilgrimage. It will be otherwise when the Bridegroom in his glory will take her to himself "in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." But if she were to say now that her color is not black, she would be deceiving herself and the truth would not be in her. So there is no reason to be surprised that she said: "I am black," and yet nonetheless gloried that she is beautiful. How can she be other than beautiful since it is said to her: "Come my beautiful one"? Since she is invited to come, she has not yet arrived. So no one should think that the invitation was addressed to a blessed one who reigns without stain in heaven, it was addressed to the dark lady who was still toiling along the way.

4. But let us try to see why she calls herself black, and why beautiful. Is she black

because of the benighted life she formerly led under the power of the prince of this world, still modeled on the image of the earthly man, and lovely because of the heavenly likeness into which she was afterwards changed as she began to live a new life? If that were so would she not have spoken of the past and said: "I was black," and not "I am black"? But if anybody wishes to see it in this light, then in the case of the words that follow: "like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon," the tent of Kedar should be understood of her former life, the tent of Solomon of the new. That curtains may have the same meaning as tent is shown by the Prophet when he says: "My tents are suddenly destroyed, in one moment my curtains have gone." Formerly she was black like the wretched tents of Kedar, but later beautiful like the curtains of the renowned King.

5. But let us see how both of these refer rather to her present state of life. If we consider the outward appearance of the saints, all that our eyes may discern, how lowly and abject it is, how slovenly through want of care; yet at the same time, inwardly, "with unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, they grow brighter and brighter as they are turned by the Spirit of the Lord into the image that they reflect." May not such a soul justly answer those who reproach her for being black: "I am black but beautiful"? Shall I point out to you a person at once both black and beautiful? "They say he writes powerful and strongly worded letters, but when he is with you, you see only half a man and no preacher at all." This was St. Paul. Daughters of Jerusalem, do you measure Paul in terms of his bodily presence, and despise him as blemished and ugly because you see only a runt of a man who has suffered hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, the hardship of constant labor, countless beatings, often to the verge of death? These are the experiences that denigrate Paul; for this the Doctor of the Nations is reputed abject, dishonorable, black, beneath notice, a scrap of this world's refuse. But surely this is the man who is rapt into paradise, who, traversing the first and second heavens, penetrates by his purity to the third? O soul of surpassing beauty, even though dwelling in a sickly little body, heaven's own loveliness had not scorned your company, the angels on high did not cast you out, God's brightness did not repudiate you! Is this soul to be called black? It is black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem. Black in your estimation, but beautiful in the eyes of God and the angels. The blackness you observe is merely external. Not that it makes the slightest difference to Paul whether you find him worthy or not, you who judge according to appearances. "Man looks at appearances but God looks at the heart." Hence though black without, he is beautiful within, intent on pleasing him to whom he must prove himself; for if he

still endeavored to be pleasing to you he would not be the servant of Christ. Happy the darkness that begets radiance in the mind, a light of knowledge and cleanness of conscience.

6. And finally, listen to what God promises through his Prophet to those blemished with this kind of blackness, those who seem discolored as by the sun's heat through the lowliness of a penitential life, through zeal for charity. He says: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be white as wool." The outward blemishes that we may discern in any people are not to be condemned, because they play a part in the begetting of interior light, and so depose the soul for wisdom. For wisdom is described by the wise man as a reflection of eternal life," and brightness befits the soul in which it decides to dwell. If the soul of the righteous man is the seat of wisdom, I may certainly refer to such a soul as bright. Righteousness itself can be called brightness. Paul was a righteous man for whom was laid up "a crown of righteousness." Therefore the soul of Paul was adorned with brightness, and wisdom dwelt there, to enable him to impart wisdom among the mature, a wisdom hidden in mystery, which none of the rulers of this world understood. This wisdom and righteousness of Paul were either produced or merited through the outward impairment of his little body, worn out by constant labors, by frequent fastings and vigils. Hence this ugliness of Paul is more beautiful than jeweled ornaments, than the raiment of kings. No physical loveliness can compare with it, no skin however bright and glowing; not the tinted cheek for which corruption waits, nor the costly dress that time wears out; not the luster of gold nor sparkle of gems, nor any other creature: all will crumble into corruption.

7. It is with good reason then that the saints find no time for the glamour of jewelry and the elegance of dress, that lose their appeal with the passing hour; their whole attention is fixed on improving and adorning the inward self that is made to the image of God, and is renewed day by day. For they are certain that nothing can be more pleasing to God than his own image when restored to its original beauty. Hence all their glory is within, not without; not in the beauty of nature nor in the praises of the crowd, but in the Lord. With St. Paul they say: "Our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience;" because the sole judge of their conscience is God, whom alone they desire to please, and pleasing him is their sole, true and highest glory. There is nothing mean about that inward glory, for, as David points out, the Lord of glory takes his delight in it: "All his glory is with the daughter of the king." Each one's glory is all the more secure when in his

own keeping, and not in another. And the saints glory not only in their inward light but even in the unsightliness of their outward appearance; nothing in them is without its use, "everything works for good." Sufferings are their joy equally with their hope. St Paul says: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." How desirable that weakness for which the power of Christ compensates. Let me be not merely weak, then, but entirely resourceless, utterly helpless. that I may enjoy the support of the power of the Lord of hosts! "For virtue is perfected in weakness." And Paul adds: "It is when I am weak that I am strong and powerful."

8. This being so, how aptly the bride accepted as an enhancement of her glory the insult hurled by those who envied her, rejoicing not only in her loveliness but even in her blackness. She is not ashamed of this blackness, for her Bridegroom endured it before her, and what greater glory than to be made like to him, Therefore she believes that nothing contributes more to her glory than to bear the ignominy of Christ. And hence that note of gladness and triumph as she says: "Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." The ignominy of the cross is welcome to the man who will not be an ingrate to his crucified Lord. Though it involves the stigma of blackness, it is also in the pattern and the likeness of the Lord. Listen to St Isaiah, and he will describe him for you as he saw him in spirit: "A man of sorrows and afflicted with suffering, without beauty, without majesty." And he adds: "We thought of him as a leper, struck by God and brought low. Yet he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins, and through his wounds we are healed." This is the reason for his blackness. But think at the same time of those words of St David: "You are the fairest of the sons of men," and you will find in the Bridegroom all the traits that the bride, in the words of our text, ascribes to herself.

9. Does it not seem to you, in accord with what has been said, that he could have replied to the envious Jews: "I am black but beautiful, sons of Jerusalem"? Obviously black, since he had neither beauty nor majesty; black because he was "a worm and no man, scorned by men and despised by the people." If he even made himself into sin shall I shirk saying he was black? Look steadily at him in his filth-covered cloak, livid from blows, smeared with spittle, pale as death: surely then you must pronounce him black. But enquire also of the apostles in what guise they found this same man on the mount, and ask the angels to describe him on whom they long to gaze, and the beauty you discover will compel your admiration. Beautiful in his own right, his blackness is because

of you. Even clad in my form, how beautiful you are, Lord Jesus! And not merely because of the miracles of divine power that render you glorious, but because of your truth and meekness and righteousness. Happy the man who, by attentive study of your life as a man among men, strives according to his strength to live like you. The Church in her loveliness has already received from you this blessed gift, the first fruits of her dowry; she is not slow to pattern herself on what is beautiful in you, nor ashamed to endure your ignominies. All this we must recall when she says: "I am black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem;" to which she adds the comparison: "like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon." This dictum is obscure however, and beyond the reach of those already wearied. But it is a door on which you are given time to knock. Those who are sincere will there encounter him whose light illumines mysteries; and he will open at once, because he invites you to knock. He it is who opens and no man shuts, the Church's Bridegroom, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

## **26 THE BLACKNESS OF THE BRIDE COMPARED TO THE TENTS OF KEDAR; BERNARD'S LAMENT FOR HIS BROTHER**

"As the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon." This is our starting-point, since it is where the last sermon ended. You are waiting to hear what these words mean, and in what way they are connected with the text of our previous discourse because they do bear comparison. They can be so connected that both parts of the comparison refer solely to the first clause of that text: "I am black;" or the two parts may correspond to the two parts there, one to each. The former interpretation is the more simple, the latter the more obscure. But let us try both, and for a start the one that seems more difficult. For the difficulty lies, not in the first term of the comparison, but in the last. It is obvious that Kedar, meaning darkness, corresponds to blackness; but not so obvious that the curtains of Solomon signify beauty. All must be able to see that tents can suggest the notion of darkness. For what is meant by tents but our bodies, in which we wander as pilgrims? "For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come." We even wage war in them, like soldiers in tents, like violent men taking the kingdom by force. In a word, "the life of man upon earth is a warfare," and as long as we do battle in this body "we are away from the Lord," away from the light. For "God is light," and to the extent that a man is not with him, to that extent he is in darkness, that is, in Kedar. Hence he may recognize as his own

that tearful outcry: "Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged! I have dwelt with the inhabitants of Kedar; my soul has been long a sojourner." Our bodily dwelling-place therefore, is neither a citizen's residence nor one's native home, but rather a soldier's tent or traveler's hut. This body, I repeat, is a tent, a tent of Kedar, that now intervenes to deprive the soul for a while of the vision of the infinite light, permitting that it be seen "in a mirror dimly," but not face to face.

2. Do you not see whence blackness appears on the Church's body, why persons of the greatest beauty are tainted by defects? It is because of the tents of Kedar, the waging of wearisome war, a life of prolonged misery, the distresses of bitter exile, in a word, a body that is both frail and burdensome: "for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthly tent burdens the thoughtful mind." Hence some souls long to die, that freed from the body, they may fly to the embraces of Christ. One of these unhappy people said out of his misery: "Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?" A man such as this is aware that one cannot dwell in a tent of Kedar and lead a pure life, free of stain, a life without a wrinkle, without some degree of blackness; so he longs to die and be divested of it. This is why the bride said she is black like the tents of Kedar. But how can she be beautiful like the curtains of Solomon? I feel that something beyond imagining, something sublime and sacred is so caught up in these curtains of Solomon, that I dare not approach them at all, except at the bidding of him who hid it there and sealed it. For I have read "he that is a searcher of majesty shall be overwhelmed by glory." So I shall not pursue the matter now, but leave it to another time. Meantime let it be your concern to ask this grace for me by your accustomed prayers, that we may return with greater confidence and greater eagerness to a subject that demands more than normal attention. And one may hope that a respectful knock will discover to us what rash curiosity could not achieve. Besides all that, the sorrow that oppresses me since my bereavement compels me to come to an end.

II. 3. How long shall I keep my pretense while a hidden fire burns my sad heart, consumes me from within? A concealed fire creeps forward with full play, it rages more fiercely. I, whose life is bitterness, what have I to do with this canticle? Overpowering sorrow distracts my mind, the displeasure of the Lord drains my spirit dry. For when he was taken away, he who enabled me to attend to the study of spiritual doctrine so freely and so frequently, my heart departed from me too. But up till now I have done violence to myself and kept up a pretense, lest my affection should seem stronger than my faith. While others wept, I, as you

could not but see, followed with dry eyes in the wake of the cruel bier, stood with dry eyes at the grave side till the last solemn funeral rite was performed. Clothed in priestly vestments, with my own mouth I recited the accustomed prayers over him till the end; with my own hands I cast the clay over the body of him I loved, destined soon to be at one with the clay. The eyes that beheld me were filled with tears, and the wonder was that I did not weep, since all took pity, not so much on him who had gone as on me who had lost him. Who would not be moved, even with iron for a heart, at seeing me there living on without my Gerard. All had experienced the loss, but regarded it as nothing in comparison with mine. And I? With all the force of faith that I could muster I resisted my feelings, striving, against my will, not to be vainly upset by what is but our natural destiny, a debt that all must pay by the law of our condition, by the command of God and his just judgment; the God we must fear because it is he who strikes, his will we must accept. Since then all the time I have forced myself to refrain from much weeping, though inwardly much troubled and sad. I could control my tears but could not control my sadness; in the Scripture's words: "I was troubled and did not speak." But the sorrow that I suppressed struck deeper roots within, growing all the more bitter, I realized, because it found no outlet. I confess, I am beaten. All that I endure within must needs issue forth. But let it be poured out before the eyes of my sons, who, knowing my misfortune, will look with kindness on my mourning and afford more sweet sympathy.

4. You, my sons, know how deep my sorrow is, how galling the wound it leaves. You are aware that a loyal companion has left me alone on the pathway of life: he who was so alert to my needs, so enterprising at work, so agreeable in his ways. Who was ever so necessary to me? Who ever loved me as he? My brother by blood, but bound to me more intimately by religious profession. Share my mourning with me, you who know these things. I was frail in body and he sustained me, faint of heart and he gave me courage, slothful and negligent and he spurred me on, forgetful and improvident and he gave me timely warning. Why has he been torn from me? Why snatched from my embraces, a man of one mind with me, a man according to my heart? We loved each other in life: how can it be that death separates us? And how bitter the separation that only death could bring about! While you lived when did you ever abandon me? It is totally death's doing, so terrible a parting. Who would dare refuse to spare so sweet a bond of mutual love -- who but death, that enemy of all that is sweet! Death indeed, so aptly named, whose rage has destroyed two lives in the spoliation of one. Surely this is death to me as well? Even more so to me, to whom continued



life is more wretched than any form of death. I live, and I die in living: and shall I call this life? How much more kind, O cruel death, if you had deprived me of life itself rather than of its fruit! For life without fruit is a more terrible death. The tree that bears no fruit is faced with a twofold doom: the axe and the fire. And because you envied the works that I performed, you removed beyond my reach him who was both friend and neighbor; for if these works were fruitful it was because of his zeal. How much better for me then, O Gerard, if I had lost my life rather than your company, since through your tireless inspiration, your unflinching help and under your provident scrutiny I persevered with my studies of things divine. Why, I ask, have we loved, why have we lost each other? O cruel circumstance! But pity pertains to my lot only, not to his.

III. And the reason, dear brother, is that though you have lost your loved ones, you have found others more lovable still. As for me, already so miserable, what consolation remains to me, and you, my only comfort, gone? Our bodily companionship was equally enjoyable to both, because our dispositions were so alike; but only I am wounded by the parting. All that was pleasant we rejoiced to share; now sadness and mourning are mine alone: anger has swept over me, rage is fastened on me. Both of us were so happy in each other's company, sharing the same experiences, talking together about them; now my share of these delights has ceased and you have passed on, you have traded them for an immense reward.

5. What a harvest of joys, what a profusion of blessings is yours. In place of my insignificant person you have the abiding presence of Christ, and mingling with the angelic choirs you feel our absence no loss. You have no cause to complain that we have been cut off from you, favored as you are by the constant presence of the Lord of Majesty and of his heavenly friends. But what do I have in your stead? How I long to know what you now think about me, once so uniquely yours, as I sink beneath the weight of cares and afflictions, deprived of the support you lent to my feebleness! Perhaps you still give thought to our miseries, now that you have plunged into the abyss of light, become engulfed in that sea of endless happiness. It is possible that though you once knew us according to the flesh, you now no longer know us and because you have entered into the power of the Lord you will be mindful of his righteousness alone, forgetful of ours. Furthermore, "he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him," his whole being somehow changed into a movement of divine love. He no longer has the power to experience or relish anything but God, and what God himself

experiences and relishes, because he is filled with God. But God is love, and the deeper one's union with God, the more full one is of love. And though God cannot endure pain, he is not without compassion for those who do; it is his nature to show mercy and pardon. Therefore you too must of necessity be merciful, clasped as you are to him who is Mercy; and though you no longer feel the need of mercy, though you no longer suffer, you can still be compassionate. Your love has not been diminished but only changed; when you were clothed with God you did not divest yourself of concern for us, for God is certainly concerned about us. All that smacks of weakness you have cast away, but not what pertains to love. And since love never comes to an end, you will not forget me for ever.

6. It seems to me that I can almost hear my brother saying: "Can a woman forget the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet I will not forget you." This is how it must be. You know how I am situated, how dejected in spirit, how your departure has affected me; there is none to give me a helping hand.

IV. In every emergency I look to Gerard for help, as I always did, and he is not there. Alas! then I can only sigh in my misery, like a man deprived of all resources. To whom shall I turn for advice when perplexed? In whom shall I confide when fortune is against me? Who will carry my burdens? Who will save me when danger threatens? Were not Gerard's eyes an unfailing guide to my feet? Were not my worries, O Gerard, better known to your heart than to mine, their inroads more penetrating, their pressure more acute? How often did you not free me from worldly conversations by the adroitness of your gifted words, and return me to the silence that I loved? The Lord endowed him with a discernment that enabled him to speak with due propriety and this prudence in his responses, accompanied by a certain graciousness given to him from above, made him acceptable both to his fellow monks and to people in the world, and anybody who spoke to Gerard had rarely need to see me. He made a point of meeting visitors to forestall and prevent them from inopportune intrusion on my solitude. When he did lack the competence to satisfy the needs of some, he brought them to me; the others he dealt with and dismissed. What a busy man he was! What a trustworthy friend!

## **KEDAR; BERNARD'S LAMENT FOR HIS BROTHER (Continued)**

Though always glad to be in the company of friends, he was never thereby prevented from answering the call of charity. Who ever went away from him empty-handed? The rich found enlightenment, the poor were given alms. Nor did he seek his own advantage, he who shouldered every burden that I might be free. In his great humility he hoped for more fruit from our quiet than if he himself had leisure. Yet he did sometimes ask to be discharged from his office, that a more efficient administrator might take over. But where could such a man be found? Charity alone, and not, as so often happens, mere wanton desire for position, detained him there. Nobody worked so hard as he, and nobody received less in return; and quite often, after he had supplied everybody's needs, he himself stood in need in many ways, for example in food and clothing. And when he knew that he was close to death, this is what he said: "O God, you know that in as far as it was possible for me I have wanted a tranquil life, the freedom to be with you. But fear of you, the community's will and my own desire to obey, and above all my deep love for one who was both my abbot and my brother, kept me involved in the business of the house. That is how it was. So I may thank you, dear brother, for what fruits may result from my studies of the things of God. What progress I have made, what good I have done, I owe to you. Your involvement in the business of the house gave me the leisure and privacy for more prayerful absorption in divine contemplation, for more thorough preparation of doctrine for my sons. Why should I not rest secure in my cell when I knew that you were my spokesman with the people, my right-hand man, the light of my eyes, my heart and my tongue? A tireless hand, a candid eye, a wise heart, a judicious tongue, just like Scripture says: "The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom and his tongue speaks what is right."

V. 7. But why have I described Gerard as a mere external worker, as if he were ignorant of the interior life and devoid of spiritual gifts? Spiritual men who knew him knew that his words bore a spiritual aroma. His comrades knew that his dispositions and propensities were anything but worldly, they were alive with a spiritual power. Who was more uncompromising than he in the maintenance of discipline? Who were more austere in bodily mortification, more absorbed in contemplation, more skilled in discussion? How often when talking with him have I increased my knowledge; I who approached to enlighten him came away enlightened instead!

And no surprise that I should experience this, since men of learning and consequence testify to similar experiences when meeting with him. He had no knowledge of literature; but he possessed the intelligence that is its source and the Holy Spirit who is the mind's light. And whether the occasion was small or great, he displayed an equal standard of excellence. For example, did anything ever escape the skilled eye of Gerard in the buildings, in the fields, in gardening, in the water systems, in all the arts and crafts of the people of the countryside? With masterly competence he supervised the masons, the smiths, the farm workers, the gardeners, the shoemakers and the weavers. And yet, he whom all esteemed as supremely wise, was devoid of wisdom in his own estimation. One could mightily wish that so many people, all of them less than wise, would cease to expose themselves to that scriptural reproach: "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes." I speak to men who are aware of these facts, who know that finer things still might be said of him. I shall not say them however, because he is my blood-brother. But I do say without a qualm: I found him helpful above all others and in every situation, helpful on small occasions and great, in private and in public, in the world and in the cloister. It was only right that I should depend entirely on him, he was all in all to me. He left me little more than the name and honor of provider, he did the work. I was saluted as abbot, but he was the one who watched over all with solicitude. I could not but feel secure with a man who enabled me to enjoy the delights of divine love, to preach with greater facility, to pray without anxiety. I must repeat that through you, my dear brother, I enjoyed a peaceful mind and a welcome peace; my preaching was more effective, my prayer more fruitful, my study more regular, my love more fervent.

8. Alas! You have been taken away and these good offices too. All my delights, all my pleasures, have disappeared along with you. Already cares rush in upon me, troubles press about me on every side; manifold anxieties have found me companionless, and, since you departed, have stayed with me in my solitude. In my loneliness I groan under the burden. Because your shoulders are no longer there to support it, I must lay it down or be crushed. O, if I could only die at once and follow you! Certainly I would not have died in your stead, I would not deprive you of the glory that is yours. But to survive you can mean only drudgery and pain. My life, if you can call it that, will be one of bitterness and mourning; it will even be my comfort to endure this painful grief. I shall not spare myself, I shall even cooperate with the hand of the Lord: for "the hand of the Lord has touched me." It is I who am touched and stricken, not he, for it has but summoned him to

repose; in cutting short his life it has brought me death. One can scarcely speak of him as dead! Was he not rather transplanted into life? At least what was for him the gateway to life is simply death to me; for by that death it is I who died, not he; he has but gone to sleep in the Lord. Flow on, flow on, my tears, so long on the point of brimming over; flow on, for he who dammed up your exit is here no longer. Let the floodgates of my wretched head be opened, let my tears gush forth like fountains, that they may perchance wash away the stains of those sins that drew God's anger upon me. When the Lord shall have been appeased in my regard, then perhaps I shall find the grace of consolation, but without ceasing to mourn: for "those who mourn shall be comforted."

VI. Therefore my request to every good man is that he look on me with kindness, and in a spirit of gentleness which is spiritual support to me in my lament. And I implore you, let not mere conventional respect, but your human affection, draw you to me in my sorrow. Day after day we see the dead bewailing their dead: floods of tears, but all to no purpose. Not that I condemn the affection they show, unless it be out of all proportion, but the reason that inspires it. The former springs from nature, the disturbance it causes is but a consequence of sin; the latter however is sinful vanity. Their weeping, if I mistake not, is solely for the loss of earthly glory, because of the misfortunes of the present life. Those who so weep should themselves be wept for. Can it be possible that I am one of them? My emotional outburst is certainly like theirs, but the cause, the intention, differs. I make no complaint at all about the ways of this world. But I do lament the loss of a loyal helper, one whose advice on the things of God was ever reliable. It is Gerard whom I weep for. Gerard is the reason for my weeping, my brother by blood, but closer by an intimate spiritual bond, the one who shared all my plans.

9. My soul cleaved to his. We were of one mind, and it was this, not blood relationship, that joined us as one. That he was my blood-brother certainly mattered; but our spiritual affinity, our similar outlooks and harmony of temperaments, drew us more close still. We were of one heart and one soul; the sword pierced both my soul and his, and cutting them apart, placed one in heaven but abandoned the other in the mire. I am that unhappy portion prostrate in the mud, mutilated by the loss of its nobler part, and shall people say to me: "Do not weep"? My very heart is torn from me and shall it be said to me: "Try not to feel it"? But I do feel it intensely in spite of myself, because my strength is not the strength of stones nor is my flesh of bronze. I feel it and go on grieving; my pain is ever with me. He who chastises me will never be able to accuse me of

hardness and insensibility, like those of whom it was said: "You have struck them; they have not felt it." I have made public the depth of my affliction, I make no attempt to deny it. Will you say then that this is carnal? That it is human, yes, since I am a man. If this does not satisfy you then I am carnal. Yes, I am carnal, sold under sin, destined to die, subject to penalties and sufferings. I am certainly not insensible to pain; to think that I shall die, that those who are mine will die, fills me with dread. And Gerard was mine, so utterly mine. Was he not mine who was a brother to me by blood, a son by religious profession, a father by his solicitude, my comrade on the spiritual highway, my bosom friend in love? And it is he who has gone from me. I feel it, the wound is deep.

10. My sons, forgive me; or better still, as sons, grieve for your father's misfortune. "Have pity on me, at least you my friends," for you can see how heavy the penalty I have received from God's hand for my sins. With the rod of his anger he struck me, justly because I deserve it, harshly because I can bear it. Can any man lightly say that I can get along without Gerard, unless he be ignorant of all that Gerard meant to me? I have no wish to repudiate the decrees of God, nor do I question that judgment by which each of us has received his due; he the crown he had earned, I the punishment I deserved. Shall I find fault with his judgment because I wince from the pain? This latter is but human, the former is impious. It is but human and necessary that we respond to our friends with feeling: that we be happy in their company, disappointed in their absence. Social intercourse, especially between friends, cannot be purposeless; the reluctance to part and the yearning for each other when separated, indicate how meaningful their mutual love must be when they are together.

VII. I grieve for you, my dearest Gerard, not for the sake of grieving, but because you have been separated from me. Perhaps my grieving should be on my own account, because the cup I drink is bitter. And I grieve by myself because I drink by myself: for you cannot join me. All by myself I experience the sufferings that are shared equally by lovers when compelled to remain apart.

11. Would that I have not lost you, but have sent you on before me! Would that one day, however far off, I may follow you wherever you go! One cannot doubt but that you have gone to those whom you invited to sing God's praise in the middle of your last night on earth, when with face and voice all joyful, to the astonishment of those about you, you burst into that hymn of David: "Let heaven praise the Lord, praise him in the heights." Even then, for you, dear brother, the

midnight dark was yielding to the dawn, the night was growing bright like the day. Surely that night was your light in your pleasures! I was summoned to witness this miracle, to see a man exulting in the hour of death, and mocking its onset. "O death, where is your victory?" A sting no longer but a shout of joy. A man dies while he sings, he sings by dying. Begetter of sorrow, you have been made a source of gladness; an enemy to glory, you have been made to contribute to glory; the gate of hell, you have been made the threshold of heaven; the very pit of perdition, you have been made a way of salvation, and that by a man who was a sinner. Justly too, because in your rashness you wickedly grasped at power over man in his state of innocence and justice. You are dead, O death, pierced by the hook you have incautiously swallowed, even as the Prophet said: "O death, I will be your death; O hell, I will be your destruction." Pierced by that hook, you open a broad and happy exit to life for the faithful who pass through your midst. Gerard had no fear of you, shadowy phantom that you are. Gerard passes on to his fatherland through your jaws, not only secure but filled with overflowing joy. So when I arrived, and heard him finishing the last verses of the Psalm in a clear voice, I saw him look toward heaven and say: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Sighing frequently, he repeated the same word: "Father, Father;" then turning to me, his face lit up with joy, he said: "How great the goodness of God, that he should become a father to men! How great a glory for men, that they are sons of God, heirs of God! For if sons, then heirs too." This is how he sang, the man we mourn for; and he could well have changed my mourning into song, for with my mind fixed on his glory, the sense of my own misery had begun to fade.

12. But the pang of sorrow quickly recalls me to myself from that serene vision; I am roused, as from a light sleep, by a gnawing anxiety. I continue to lament, but over my own plight, because reason forbids me to mourn for him. I feel that given the occasion, he would now say to us: "Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves."

VIII. David rightly mourned for his parricidal son, because he knew all exit from the pit of death was denied to him forever by the greatness of his sin. Rightly he mourned over Saul and Jonathan, for whom, once engulfed by death, there seemed no hope of deliverance. They will rise indeed, but not to life: or if to life, only to die more miserably in a living death, though one must reasonably hesitate to apply this judgment to Jonathan. As for me, though my mourning may not be for this reason, it is not without reason. In the first place I bewail my own wounds

and the loss this house has suffered; I bewail the needs of the poor, to whom Gerard was a father; I bewail above all the state of our whole Order, of our religious life, that derived no small support from your zeal, your wisdom and your example, O Gerard; and finally, though my mourning is not for you, it is because of you. My deepest wound is in the ardor of my love for you. And let no one embarrass me by telling me I am wrong in yielding to this feeling, when the kindhearted Samuel poured out the love of his heart for a reprobate king, and David for his parricidal son, without injury to their faith, without offending the judgment of God. Holy David cried out: "Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom!" And see, a greater than Absalom is here. Our Savior too, looking at Jerusalem and foreseeing its destruction, wept over it. And shall I not feel my own desolation that even now presses upon me? Shall I not grieve for the heavy blow so recently received? David's tears were tears of compassion, and shall I be afraid to weep in my suffering? At the tomb of Lazarus Christ neither rebuked those who wept nor forbade them to weep, rather he wept with those who wept. The Scripture says: "And Jesus wept." These tears were witnesses to his human kindness, not signs that he lacked trust. Moreover, he who had been dead came forth at once at his word, lest the manifestation of sorrow be thought harmful to faith.

13. In the same way, our weeping is not a sign of a lack of faith, it indicates the human condition. Nor do I rebuke the striker if I weep on receiving the blow, rather do I invite his mercy, I try to mitigate his severity. You hear the heavy note of sorrow in my words, but I am far from murmuring. Have I not been completely fair when I said that the one who was punished deserved it, the one who was crowned was worthy of it? And I still aver that the sweet and just Lord acted fairly to us both. "My song, O Lord, shall be of mercy and judgment." Let that mercy poured out by you on your servant Gerard sing to you; and let that judgment that I endure sing to you as well. I praise your goodness to him, your justice to me. Shall goodness alone merit praise, and not justice? "You are righteous indeed, O Lord, and all your judgments are right." You gave me Gerard, you took him away: And if his removal makes me sad, I do not forget that he was given to me, and offer thanks for my good fortune in having had him. My regret at his departure is but in accord with the need it has exposed.

14. I will meditate, O Lord, on my covenant with you, and on your mercy, that you may be justified in passing sentence on me, and blameless in your judgments. Last year when we were at Viterbo on the Church's business, Gerard became ill,



so ill that it seemed God was about to call him to himself. I felt it unthinkable that my companion on my journeys, and so wonderful a companion, should be left behind in a foreign land. I had to restore him to those who had entrusted him to me. All of them loved him because he was so utterly lovable. So I began to pray in the midst of my tears and said: "Wait O Lord, till we return home. Let me give him back to his friends, then take him if you wish, and I shall not complain." You listened to me O God, his health improved, we finished the work you had enjoined on us, and, laden with the fruits of peace, returned in great happiness. Since then I lost sight of my agreement with you, but you did not forget. I am ashamed of these sobs of grief that go to prove my unfaithfulness. What more shall I say? You entrusted Gerard to us, you have claimed him back; you have but taken what was yours. These tears prevent me speaking further; impose a limit on them O Lord, bring them to an end.

### **SERMON 27 THE BEAUTY OF THE BRIDE COMPARED TO THE CURTAINS OF SOLOMON WHY SHE IS CALLED A HEAVEN**

My brothers, our friend has gone back to his homeland, we have paid the full tribute of human affection to his memory, so I take up again the instruction which I then discontinued. As he is now in the state of happiness it is improper to prolong our mourning for him, it is out of place to appear in tears before a man enjoying a banquet. Even though we do shed tears in our troubles, our grief should not be excessive, or it will seem to express our regret for the service we have lost rather than our love for him. To think that the one we love is in a state of bliss must ease the pain of our bereavement; to realize that he is with God must make his absence from us more bearable. And so, trusting in the aid of your prayers, I shall attempt to throw light on the secret hidden by those curtains that portray the beauty of the bride. We touched on this, as you recall, but did not delve into it, though we had discussed and discovered how she is black like the tents of Kedar. But in what way can she be beautiful like the curtains of Solomon, as if Solomon in all his glory could even remotely resemble the beauty of the bride, or possessed anything to match the splendor of her adornment? Even if I were to say that these mysterious curtains refer to the quality of blackness as well as to the tents of Kedar, I should perhaps be correct; there are arguments to support this, as I shall show later. But if we suppose that the beauty of any sort of curtains is to be compared to the glory of the bride, then we need the help for

which you have been praying, if we are to be worthy to unveil this mystery. For must not outward loveliness, no matter how radiant, seem to an enlightened mind to be cheap and ugly, when compared with the inward beauty of a holy soul? What qualities can we find within the framework of this passing world that can equal the radiance of a soul that has shed its decrepit, earthly body, and been clothed in heaven's loveliness, graced with the jewels of consummate virtue, clearer than mountain air because of its transcendence, more brilliant than the sun? So do not look back to the earthly Solomon when you wish to investigate the ownership of those curtains whose beauty delights the bride because so like her own.

2. What does she mean then by saying: "I am beautiful like the curtains of Solomon"? I feel that here we have a great and wonderful mystery, provided that we apply the words, not to the Solomon of this Song, but to him who said of himself: "What is here is greater than Solomon." This Solomon to whom I refer is so great a Solomon that he is called not only Peaceful -- which is the meaning of the word Solomon -- but Peace itself; for Paul proclaims that "He is our Peace." I am certain that in this Solomon we can discover something that we may unhesitatingly compare with the beauty of the bride. Note especially what the Psalm says of his curtains: "You have spread out the heavens like a curtain." The first Solomon, though sufficiently wise and powerful, did not spread out the heavens like a curtain; it was he, rather who is not merely wise but Wisdom itself, who both created them and spread them out. It was he, and not the former Solomon, who spoke these words of God his Father: "When he set the heavens in their place, I was there." His power and his wisdom were undoubtedly present at the establishing of the heavens. And do not imagine that he stood by idle, as merely a spectator, because he said "I was there," and not "I was cooperating." Search further on in this text and you will find that he clearly states he was with him arranging all things. Therefore he said: "Whatever the Father does, the Son does too." He it was who spread out the heavens like a curtain, a curtain of superlative beauty that covers the whole face of the earth like a huge tent, and charms our human eyes with the variegated spectacle of sun and moon and stars. Is there anything more lovely than this curtain? Anything more bejeweled than the heavens? Yet even this can in no way be compared to the splendor and comeliness of the bride. It fails because it is a physical thing, the object of our physical senses; its form will pass away. "For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

II. 3. The bride's form must be understood in a spiritual sense, her beauty as something that is grasped by the intellect; it is eternal because it is an image of eternity. Her gracefulness consists of love, and you have read that "love never ends." It consist of justice, for "her justice endures forever." It consists of patience, and Scripture tells you "the patience of the poor shall not perish forever." What shall I say of voluntary poverty? Of humility? To the former an eternal kingdom is promised, to the latter an eternal exaltation. To these must be added the holy fear of the Lord that endures for ever and ever; prudence too, and temperance and fortitude and all other virtues; what are they but pearls in the jeweled raiment of the bride, shining with unceasing radiance? I say unceasing, because they are the basis, the very foundation of immortality. For there is no place for immortal and blissful life in the soul except by means and mediation of the virtues. Hence the Prophet, speaking to God who is eternal happiness, says: "Justice and judgment are the foundation of your throne." And the Apostle says that Christ dwells in our hearts, not in any and every way, but particularly by faith. When Christ, too, was about to ride on the ass, the disciples spread their cloaks underneath him, to signify that our Savior, or his salvation, will not rest in the naked soul until it is clothed with the teaching and discipline of the apostles. Therefore the Church, possessing the promise of happiness to come, now prepares for it by adorning herself in cloth of gold, girding herself with a variety of graces and virtues, in order to be found worthy and capable of the fulness of grace.

4. Though this visible, material heaven, with its great variety of stars is unsurpassingly beautiful within the bounds of the material creation, I should not dare to compare its beauty with the spiritual and varied loveliness she received with her first robe when being arrayed in the garments of holiness. But there is a heaven of heavens to which the Prophet refers. "Sing to the Lord who mounts above the heaven of heavens, to the east." This heaven is in the world of the intellect and the spirit; and he who made the heavens by his wisdom, created it to be his eternal dwelling-place. You must not suppose that the bride's affections can find rest outside of this heaven, where she knows her Beloved dwells: for where her treasure is, there her heart is too. She so yearns for him that she is jealous of those who live in his presence; and since she may not yet participate in the vision that is theirs, she strives to resemble them in the way she lives. By deeds rather than words she proclaims: "Lord, I love the beauty of your house, the place where your glory dwells."

III. 5. She has no objection whatever to being compared to this heaven, made glorious by the marvelous and manifold works of the Creator, that reaches out like a curtain, not over mighty spaces but over the hearts of men. Any distinctions that exist there do not consist of colors but of degrees of bliss. Among its inhabitants we find Angels, Archangels, Virtues, Dominations, Principalities, Powers, Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim. These are that heaven's sparkling stars, these are that curtain's shining glories. We are dealing with only one of the curtains of my Solomon, but the one that surpasses all in the radiance of its multiform glory. This immense curtain contains within itself many other curtains of Solomon, for every blessed and saint who dwells there is indeed a curtain of Solomon. They overflow with kindness, their love reaches out till it comes down even to us. Far from begrudging us the glory they enjoy, they want us to share it, and hence find it no burden to accompany us for that purpose, sedulously watching over us and our concerns. They are all spirits whose work is service, sent to help those who will be the heirs of salvation. Therefore, since the multitude of the blessed, taken as a unit, is called the heaven of heavens, so, when taken individually, they are called the heavens of heavens, because each is a heaven, and we may apply to each the words: "You have spread out heaven like a curtain." You now see, I hope, what these curtains are to which the bride so assuredly compares herself, and to which Solomon they belong.

IV. 6. Contemplate what a glory is hers who compares herself to heaven, even to that heaven who is so much more glorious as he is divine. This is no rashness, taking her comparison from whence her origin comes. For if she compares herself to the tents of Kedar because of her body drawn from the earth, why should she not glory in her likeness to heaven because of the heavenly origin of her soul, especially since her life bears witness to her origin and to the dignity of her nature and her homeland? She adores and worships one God, just like the angels; she loves Christ above all things, just like the angels; she is chaste, just like the angels, and that in the flesh of a fallen race, in a frail body that the angels do not have. But she seeks and savors the things that they enjoy, not the things that are on the earth. What can be a clearer sign of her heavenly origin than that she retains a natural likeness to it in the land of unlikeness, than that as an exile on earth she enjoys the glory of the celibate life, than that she lives like an angel in an animal body? These gifts reveal a power that is more of heaven than of earth. They clearly indicate that a soul thus endowed is truly from heaven. But Scripture is clearer still: "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a

great voice from the throne saying: `Behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell among them.' " But why? In order to win a bride for himself from among men. How wonderful this? He came to seek a bride, but did not come without one. He sought a bride, but she was with him. Had he then two brides? Certainly not. "My dove is only one," he says. Just as he wished to form one flock of the scattered flocks of sheep, that there might be one flock and one shepherd, so, although from the beginning he had for bride the multitude of angels, it pleased him to summon the Church from among men and unite it with the one from heaven, that there might be but the one bride and one Bridegroom. The one from heaven perfects the earthly one; it does not make two. Hence he says: "My perfect one is only one." Their likeness makes them one, one now in their similar purpose, one hereafter in the same glory.

7. These two then have their origin in heaven -- Jesus the Bridegroom and Jerusalem the bride. He, in order to be seen by men, "emptied himself taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." But the bride -- in what form or exterior loveliness, in what guise did St John see her coming down? Was it perhaps in the company of the angels whom he saw ascending and descending upon the Son of Man? It is more accurate to say that he saw the bride when he looked on the Word made flesh, and acknowledged two natures in the one flesh. For when that holy Emmanuel introduced to earth the curriculum of heavenly teaching, when we came to know the visible image and radiant comeliness of that supernal Jerusalem, our mother, revealed to us in Christ and by his means, what did we behold if not the bride in the Bridegroom? What did we admire but that same person who is the Lord of glory, the Bridegroom decked with a garland, the bride adorned with her jewels? So "He who descended is he also who ascended," since "no one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven," the one and same Lord who as head of the Church is the Bridegroom, as body is the bride. This heaven-formed man did not appear on earth in vain, since he endowed a multitude of earthly followers with his own heavenly image. As Scripture says: "the heavenly Man is the pattern of all the heavenly." From that time the lives of many on earth have been like the lives of heaven's citizens, as when, after the example of that exalted and blessed bride, she who came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, embraced the heavenly Bridegroom with a chaste love. Though, unlike the blessed bride, not yet united to him by vision, she is still espoused to him by faith, as God promised through the Prophet's words: "I will betroth you to me in steadfast love and mercy, I will betroth you to me in faithfulness." Hence she

strives more and more to resemble her who came from heaven, learning from her to be modest and prudent, learning to be chaste and holy, to be patient and compassionate, and ultimately to be meek and humble of heart. By these virtues she endeavors, even while absent, to be pleasing to him on whom the angels long to look. With a love angelic in its fervor she shows herself to be a fellow-citizen with the saints and a domestic of God, she shows that she is beloved, that she is a bride.

V. 8. I believe that all persons such as I have described are not only heavenly because of their origin but that each so resembles heaven as to merit being so named. Their heavenly origin is most evident since their life is centered in heaven. The holy person whose gift of faith is like a moon and whose virtues are like stars, is truly a heaven. We could mean by the sun zeal for justice and fervent love and by the moon continence. Without the sun there is no brightness in the moon, and without justice and love there is no merit in continence. Hence that saying of Wisdom: "How beautiful is the chaste generation with its love." And to call the stars virtues gives me no qualms, the aptness of the metaphor is so obvious. For just as the stars that shine by night are hidden by day, so true virtue that passes unnoticed in prosperity, becomes conspicuous in adversity. What prudence conceals, necessity forces into the open. So, if virtue be a star, the virtuous man is a heaven. But we are not to suppose that when God, speaking through his Prophet, said "heaven is my throne, he was referring to the wheeling heavens we see above us; no, in another text of Scripture we find what he meant more clearly expressed: "The soul of the just is the seat of wisdom." If you recall the Savior's teaching that God is a spirit, to be adored in spirit, you must realize that God's throne is a spiritual entity. This truth I confidently affirm, in the case of a just man no less than of an angel. My belief in its truth is further strengthened by the faithful promise of the Son: "I and the Father will come to him," that is, to the holy man, "and make our dwelling with him." I feel too that the Prophet meant this heaven when he said: "You dwell in the holy place, the praise of Israel." Finally, the Apostle says explicitly that "Christ dwells by faith in our hearts."

9. No need to be surprised that the Lord Jesus should be pleased to dwell in this heaven, which he not only called into being by his word like the other creatures, but fought to acquire and died to redeem. And when his passion was over the longing of his heart found echo in the words: "This is my resting-place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it." Happy therefore is the one to whom he says: "Come my chosen one, and I shall set up my throne within you." Why are

you sad now, my soul, why do you trouble me? Do you not think you will find within you a place for the Lord? Which of us indeed is suited for so much glory, qualified to welcome so majestic a being? Would that I were worthy to worship at his footstool! Who will grant me at least to walk in the footsteps of some holy soul whom he has chosen as his heritage? Would that he anointed my soul with the oil of his mercy, to extend it like a curtain of skin that expands when anointed, and I should be able to say: "I have run the way of your commandments, when you enlarged my heart." Then perhaps I should find within me not so much a great dining-hall where he might recline with his discipline, as a place where he might lay his head. From afar off I gaze toward the truly blessed ones, of whom is said: "I will live in them and move among them."

VI. 10. What a capacity this soul has, how privileged its merits, that it is found worthy not only to receive the divine presence, but to be able to make sufficient room! What can I say of her who can provide avenues spacious enough for the God of majesty to walk in! She certainly cannot afford to be entangled in law-suits nor by worldly cares; she cannot be enslaved by gluttony and sensual pleasures, by the lust of the eyes, the ambition to rule, or by pride in the possession of power. If she is to become heaven, the dwelling-place of God, it is first of all essential that she be empty of all these defects. Otherwise how could she be still enough to know that he is God? Nor may she yield in the least to hatred or envy or bitterness, "because wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul." The soul must grow and expand, that it may be roomy enough for God. Its width is its love, if we accept what the Apostle says: "Widen your hearts in love." The soul, being a spirit, does not admit of material expansion, but grace confers gifts on it that nature is not equipped to bestow. Its growth and expansion must be understood in a spiritual sense; it is its virtue that increases, not its substance. Even its glory is increased. And finally it grows and advances toward "mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Eventually it becomes "a holy temple in the Lord." The capacity of any man's soul is judged by the amount of love he possesses; hence he who loves much is great, he who loves a little is small, he who has no love is nothing, as Paul said: "If I have not love, I am nothing." But if he begins to acquire some love however, if he tries at least to love those who love him, and salutes the brethren and others who salute him, I may no longer describe him as nothing because some love must be present in the give and take of social life. In the words of the Lord, however, what more is he doing than others. When I discover a love as mediocre as this, I cannot call such a man noble or great: he is obviously narrow-minded and mean.

11. But if his love expands and continues to advance till it outgrows these narrow, servile confines, and finds itself in the open ranges where love is freely given in full liberty of spirit; when from the generous bounty of his goodwill he strives to reach out to all his neighbors, loving each of them as himself, surely one may no longer query, "What more are you doing than others? Indeed he has made himself vast. His heart is filled with a love that embraces everybody, even those to whom it is not tied by the inseparable bonds of family relationship; a love that is not allured by any hope of personal gain, that possesses nothing it is obliged to restore, that bears no burden of debt whatever, apart from that one of which it is said: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." Progressing further still, you may endeavor to take the kingdom of love by force, until by this holy warfare you succeed in possessing it even to its farthest bounds. Instead of shutting off your affections from your enemies, you will do good to those who hate you, you will pray for those who persecute and slander you, you will strive to be peaceful even with those who hate peace. Then the width, height and beauty of your soul will be the width, height and beauty of heaven itself, and you will realize how true it is that he has "stretched out the heavens like a curtain." In this heaven whose width, height and beauty compel our admiration, he who is supreme and immense and glorious is not only pleased to dwell, but to wander far and wide on its pathways.

VII. 12. Do you not now see what heavens the Church possesses within her, and that she herself, in her universality, is an immense heaven, stretching out "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth." Consider therefore, to what you may compare her in this respect, provided you do not forget what I mentioned a short while ago concerning the heaven of heaven and heavens of heavens. Just like our mother above, this one, though still a pilgrim, has her own heaven: spiritual men outstanding in their lives and reputations, men of genuine faith, unshaken hope, generous love, men raised to the heights of contemplation. These men rain down God's saving work like showers, reprove with a voice of thunder, shine with a splendor of miracles. They proclaim the glory of God, and stretched out like curtains over all the earth, make known the law of life and knowledge written by God's finger into their own lives, "to give knowledge of salvation to his people." They show forth the gospel of peace, because they are the curtain of Solomon.

13. In these curtains then we must discern the likeness of those heavenly figures



whom we have just described as part of the Bridegroom's adornment. We must recognize too the queen standing at his right hand, decked with ornaments similar, though not equal, to his. For although she is endowed with no small share of glory and beauty even where she sojourns as a pilgrim,<sup>8</sup> as well as in the day of her strength amid the splendors of the saints, yet the fullness and perfection of the glory of the blessed crowns her Bridegroom in a way that is different. If I do refer to the bride as perfect and blessed, she is not wholly so. In part she resembles the tents of Kedar; but she is also beautiful, both in that part of her which already reigns in heaven, and in those illustrious men whose wisdom and virtues grace her journey through the night, like a heaven spangled with stars. Hence the Prophet's words: "The wise leaders shall shine like the bright vault of heaven, and those who have guided the people in the true path shall be like stars for ever and ever."

14. How lowly! Yet how sublime! At the same time tent of Kedar and sanctuary of God; an earthly tent and a heavenly palace; a mud hut and a royal apartment; a body doomed to death and a temple bright with light; an object of contempt to the proud, yet the bride of Christ. She is black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem: for though the hardship and sorrow of prolonged exile darkens her complexion, a heavenly loveliness shines through it, the curtains of Solomon enhance it. If the swarthy skin repels you, you must still admire the beauty; if you scorn what seems lowly, you must look up with esteem to what is sublime. Indeed you must note the prudence, the great wisdom, the amount of discretion and sense of fittingness generated in the bride by that controlled interplay of lowliness and exaltation according as occasion demands, so that amid the ups and downs of this world her sublime gifts sustain her lowliness lest she succumb to adversity; while her lowliness curbs her exaltation or good fortune will bring it toppling down. These poles of her life act so harmoniously. Though of their nature opposites they will work with equal effectiveness for the good of the bride. They subserve her spiritual welfare.

15. So much for the likeness which the bride seems to postulate between her beauty and the curtains of Solomon. With regard to this same text however, we still have to explain that meaning to which I referred at the beginning of this discourse and for which I have given my promise: the extent to which the whole similitude may be applied to her blackness only. You shall not be cheated out of that promise. But it must be postponed till the next sermon, both because the length of this one demands that we do so, and in order that the customary

prayers may precede all that we hope to say for the praise and glory of the Bridegroom of the Church, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is God blessed for ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 28 THE BLACKNESS AND BEAUTY OF THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE**

I presume you remember what I consider those curtains to be to which the beauty of the bride is compared, to which Solomon they belong, and how the comparison drawn from them is directed to the manifestation and praise of that beauty. But if anyone thinks that it should rather be directed to the blackness, then we must call to mind those curtains with which Solomon once covered the tabernacle. They were certainly black, being exposed daily to the sun and to the weathering of the rains. This was no futile arrangement; it ensured that the ornaments within would preserve their brilliance. By this example the bride does not deny her blackness but excuses it. She will never be ashamed of a condition that owes its origin to charity, that is not condemned by the judgment of truth. For who is weak with whom she does not share weakness? Who is made to stumble and she is not ablaze with indignation? She accepts the blemishes consequent on works of compassion, that she may relieve or heal the sickness of passion in another. Her complexion grows dark in the zeal for moral brightness, for the prize of beauty.

2. The blackening of one makes many bright, not the blackness caused by sin, but that which results from genuine concern. "It is better," said Caiaphas, "for one man to die for the people, than for the whole nation to be destroyed." It is better that one be blackened for the sake of all "in the likeness of sinful flesh," than for the whole of mankind to be lost by the blackness of sin; that the splendor and image of the substance of God should be shrouded in the form of a slave, in order that a slave might live; that the brightness of eternal light should become dimmed in the flesh for the purging of the flesh; that he who surpasses all mankind in beauty should be eclipsed by the darkness of the Passion for the enlightening of mankind; that he himself should suffer the ignominy of the cross, grow pale in death, be totally deprived of beauty and comeliness that he might gain the Church as a beautiful and comely bride, without stain and fellows. How then this shaggy-haired likeness to Esau? Solomon; I even embrace Solomon

himself under his black covering. For though Solomon presents this black exterior, it is only in the curtain. Outwardly, in the skin, he is black, but not within. In any case, "all the glory of the king's daughter is from within." Within is the brightness of divine life, the graciousness of the virtues, the splendor of grace, the purity of innocence. But covering it all is the abject hue that indicates infirmity, with his face as it were hidden and despised, "One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning." I recognize here the image of our sin-darkened nature; I recognize the garments of skins that clothed our sinning first parents. He even brought this blackness on himself by assuming the condition of slave, and becoming as men are, he was seen as a man. I recognize under the kid-skin, a symbol of sin, both the hand that committed no sin and the neck through which thought of evil never passed; no word of treachery was found in his mouth. I know that you are gentle by nature, meek and humble of heart, pleasing in appearance and loveable in your ways, anointed "with the oil of gladness above your fellows." How then this shaggy-haired likeness to Esau? Who owns this ravaged and wrinkled face? Whose are these hairs? They are mine. These hairy hands are the sign of my likeness to sinful men. These hairs are my very own: and in my hairy skin I shall see God my Savior.

3. But it was not Rebekah who clothed him in this fashion, it was Mary; he received so much richer a blessing as he was born of a holier mother. And how rightly he is clothed in my likeness, because the blessing is being claimed, the inheritance requested, for me. For he had heard the words: "Ask of me and I will give you the nations, your heritage, and the ends of the earth, your possession." It is from your own heritage, the speaker said, your own possession, that I will give you. How will you give it to him if it is his already? And why urge him to ask for what is his own? Or how is it his own if he has to ask for it? It must be for me, that he asks; he clothed himself in my nature for this purpose, that he might take up my cause. For "on him lies a punishment that brings us peace," as the Prophet said; "and the Lord burdened him with the sins of us all." "He had to be made like his brothers in every respect," as the Apostle says, "that he might become merciful."

II. Accordingly, "the voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." What we hear from him is his, what we see in him is ours. The words he speaks are "spirit and life;" the form we see is mortal, subject to death. We see one thing and we believe another. Our senses tell us he is black, our faith declares him fair and beautiful. If he is black it is "in the eyes of the foolish," for to the minds of the

faithful he is wholly beautiful. He is black, then, but beautiful: black in the opinion of Herod, beautiful in the testimony of the penitent thief, in the faith of the centurion.

4. The man who cried out: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" certainly perceived how great his beauty was. But where he perceived that beauty to lie is for us to ascertain. For supposing he considered only what his eyes beheld, in what way was this man beautiful, how was he the Son of God? What did the eyes of the beholders see but a man deformed and black, his hands splayed out on the cross as he hung between two criminals, an object of laughter for the wicked, of weeping for the faithful. He alone was the laughingstock, he alone who could have stricken them with terror, who alone had a right to be honored. How then did the centurion see the beauty of the Crucified, how did he see as Son of God him "who was numbered with the transgressors"? It is neither right nor necessary for me to provide an answer, for the Evangelist's observation has not allowed this to escape him. He writes: "And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus cried out and breathed his last, he said: `Truly this man was the Son of God!'" It was the sound of his voice that inspired his belief, it was by the voice that he recognized the Son of God, and not by the face. Perhaps he was one of those sheep of whom Christ said: "My sheep hear my voice."

5. The hearing succeeded where the sight failed. Appearances deceived the eye, but truth poured itself into the ear. The eye saw him to be weak, detestable, wretched, a man condemned to a most shameful death; but to the ear the Son of God revealed himself, to the ear he made known his beauty, but not to that of the Jews whose ears were uncircumcised. There was a certain propriety in Peter's cutting off the servant's ear, to open up a way for the truth, that the truth might set him free, that is, make him a freedman. The centurion was uncircumcised, but not where his ear was concerned, because at that one cry of a dying man he recognized the Lord of majesty beneath all those signs of helplessness.

Therefore he did not despise what he saw, because he believed in what he did not see. He did not believe, however, because of what he saw, but, without any doubt, because of what he heard, because "faith comes from hearing." It would indeed have been a worthy thing if the truth had penetrated to the soul through the windows of the eyes which are a nobler power; but this, O my soul, is reserved for us till the life to come, when we shall see face to face. Meantime let the remedy find entrance where the ancient malady stole a march on us; let life follow the same pathway as death, light in the wake of darkness, the antidote of

truth after the poison of the serpent. And let it heal the troubled eye that it may serenely contemplate him whom the sickly eye could not see. The ear was death's first gateway, let it be the first to open up to life; let the hearing restore the vision it took from us. For unless we believe we shall not understand. Therefore hearing is connected with merit, sight with the reward. Hence the Prophet says: "You will give to my hearing joy and gladness," for the beatific vision is the reward of faithful hearing. We merit the beatific vision by our constancy in listening. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The eye that would see God must be cleansed by faith, as it is written: "He cleansed their hearts by faith."

6. In the meantime then since the sense of sight is not yet ready, let us rouse up our hearing, let us exercise it and take in the truth. Happy the man of whom Truth testifies: "At the hearing of the ear he obeyed me." I shall be worthy to see if before seeing I shall have been found obedient; I shall look on him with confidence if he has already received the service of my obedience. Blessed indeed was the man who said: "The Lord God opened my ears and I did not disobey or turn back in defiance." Here we find both a model of voluntary obedience and an example of perseverance. Spontaneity is found where there is no contradiction, and perseverance where there is no turning back. Both are necessary, for "God loves a cheerful giver," and "the man who perseveres to the end will be saved." How I wish the Lord would open my ear, that the word of his truth would enter into my heart, cleanse my eye and make it ready for that joyful vision, so that even I could say to God: "Your ear has heard the preparation of my heart." That even I, along with his other obedient followers, should hear from God: "You are clean by the word which I have spoken to you." Not all who hear are cleansed, but those only who obey, the blessed ones are those who both hear and keep the word. This is the hearing he asks for with the command: "Hear, O Israel;" this is the hearing he offers who says: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening;" and this is the response that such a man makes: "Let me hear what God the Lord will speak within me."

III. 7. To assure you that the Holy Spirit follows this order in promoting the soul's spiritual welfare, enabling it to hear before gladdening it with vision, Scripture says: "Hear, O daughter, and see." So why strain with your eyes? Prepare rather to hear. Do you wish to see Christ? The first thing for you to do is to hear him, to hear about him, so that when you do see you may say: "As we have heard, so have we seen." His glory is immense, the scope of the eye is meager and cannot

attain to it. But where the eye fails, the ear succeeds. So when God cried out: "Adam, where are you?" I could no longer see him because I was a sinner, but I heard him. The hearing, if it be loving, alert and faithful, will restore the sight. Faith will cleanse the eye exacerbated by godlessness; obedience will open what disobedience closed. "From your precepts," says the Psalmist, "I get understanding:" the keeping of the commandments restores the intellectual light clouded over by sin. See how the faithful Isaac retained in old age a power of hearing whose vigor surpassed that of the other senses. The Patriarch's eyes grow dim, his palate is deceived, his hand lets him down, but his ear does not let him down. What wonder if the ear catches the truth, since faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the word of God, and the word of God is truth? "The voice," he said, "is the voice of Jacob." True! "But the hands are the hands of Esau." False! You are deceived. The resemblance of the hand has led you astray. Nor is truth found in the taste, though it be pleasant. What truth has he if he thinks he is eating venison when he is dining off the flesh of domestic kids? Less still is it found in the eye that sees nothing. The eye is not dependable either for truth or wisdom, for Isaiah says: "Woe to you who are wise in your own eyes." Can wisdom which is accursed be good? It is of the world, and for that reason is folly in God's sight.

8. The wisdom that is good and true, as holy Job experienced it, "is drawn out of secret places." Why then seek it from without, in your bodily senses? Taste resides in the palate, but wisdom in the heart. Do not look for wisdom with your eyes of flesh, because flesh and blood will not reveal it to you, but the Spirit. Do not look for it in what the mouth tastes, for it is not found in the land of those who live for pleasure. Do not look for it in the hand's touch, for a saintly man says: "If my mouth has kissed my hand, that is a great iniquity and a denial of God." This happens, in my opinion, when the gift of God, wisdom, is ascribed not to God but to the merits of our actions. Though Isaac was wise, his senses led him astray. Only the hearing that catches the word possesses the truth. The woman whose wisdom was still carnal was rightly forbidden to touch the risen flesh of the Word, because she depended more on what she saw than on what she heard, that is, on her bodily senses rather than on God's word. She did not believe that he whom she saw dead would rise again, though he himself had made this promise. Hence her eye did not rest till her sight was satisfied, because for her there was no consolation from the faith, even God's promise was not sure. Must not heaven and earth and all those things that the human eye may reach, pass away and perish, before one iota or one dot shall pass away from the words that God has

spoken? And yet she, who refused to be consoled by the word of the Lord, ceased her crying when she saw him, because she valued experience above faith. But experience is deceptive.

9. She is impelled, therefore, to seek the surer knowledge of faith, which discerns truths unknown to the senses, beyond the range of experience. When he said: "Do not touch me," he meant: depend no longer on this fallible sense; put your trust in the word, get used to faith.

IV. Faith cannot be deceived. With the power to understand invisible truths, faith does not know the poverty of the senses; it transcends even the limits of human reason, the capacity of nature, the bounds of experience. Why do you ask the eye to do what it is not equipped to do? And why does the hand endeavor to examine things beyond its reach? What you may learn from these senses is of limited value. But faith will tell you of me without detracting from my greatness. Learn to receive with greater confidence, to follow with greater security, whatever faith commends to you. "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father." As if after he had ascended he wished to be or could be touched by her! And yet he could be touched, but by the heart, not by the hand; by desire, not by the eye; by faith, not by the senses. "Why do you want to touch me now," he says, "would you measure the glory of the resurrection by a physical touch? Do you not remember that, while I was still mortal, the eyes of the disciples could not endure for a short space the glory of my transfigured body that was destined to die? I still accommodate myself to your senses by bearing this form of a servant which you are accustomed to seeing. But this glory of mine is too wonderful for you, so high that you cannot reach it. Defer your judgment therefore, refrain from expressing an opinion, do not entrust the defining of so great a matter to the senses, it is for faith to pronounce on it. With its fuller comprehension, faith will define it more worthily and more surely. In its deep and mystical breast it can grasp what is the length and breadth and height and depth. 'What eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived,' is borne within itself by faith, as if wrapped in a covering and kept under seal.

10. "She therefore will touch me worthily who will accept me as seated with the Father, no longer in lowly guise, but in my own flesh transformed with heaven's beauty. Why wish to touch what is ugly? Have patience that you may touch the beautiful. Things will be beautiful then that are now ugly: ugly to the touch, ugly to the eye, ugly even to you in your ugliness, you who are so bound to the senses,

so indifferent to faith. Become beautiful and then touch me; live by faith and you are beautiful. In your beauty you will touch my beauty all the more worthily, with greater felicity. You will touch me with the hand of faith, the finger of desire, the embrace of love; you will touch me with the mind's eye. But shall I still be black? God forbid! Your beloved will be fair and ruddy, strikingly beautiful, surrounded by a bloom of roses and lilies of the valley, by the choirs of martyrs and virgins; and sitting in their midst, I, a virgin and martyr, am alien to neither choir. Why should I not be at ease in the white-robed choirs of virgins, virgin that I am and the Son of a Virgin, the Bridegroom of a Virgin? Or amid the red-robed choirs of the martyrs, I who am the motive, the strength, the reward and the model of martyrs? Here let kind touch its kind after the manner of its kind, and say: "My beloved is fair and ruddy, chosen out of thousands." Thousands of thousands are with the Beloved, and ten hundred thousand surround him but none compare with him. Do you not fear that in seeking your beloved, you may by mistake take one of this multitude for him? But no, you will not hesitate in making your choice. He who is a paragon among thousands, peerless in their midst, will be easy to discover. These words will spring to your mind: "He is glorious in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength." No longer therefore will he appear in the swarthy skin that up to now he had presented to the eyes of his persecutors, who would despise him to the point of killing him or even to the eyes of his friends after his resurrection, that they might recognize him. No longer will he be encountered clothed in a dark skin, but in a white robe, surpassing in beauty not only all mankind, but even the angels. Why then should you wish to touch me in this lowly condition, rigged out like a slave, contemptible to look at? But touch me in the beauty with which heaven endows me, crowned with glory and honor, awe-inspiring in the majesty of my divine life, yet loving and calm with an inborn serenity."

V. 11. Here, then, we must pay tribute to the prudence of the bride, and the profound wisdom of her words. She sought her God under the image of the curtains of Solomon, that is, in the flesh. She sought life in death, the summit of glory and honor in the midst of shame, the whiteness of innocence and the splendor of the virtues under the dark vesture of the Crucified. Those curtains, black and despicable as they were, contained beneath them jewels more precious and more brilliant than a king's riches. How right not to have been put off by the blackness in the curtains, when she glimpsed the beauty beneath them. But many were put off by it, because they failed to glimpse the beauty. "For if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Herod did not



know, and therefore he despised him. The Synagogue did not know, hence it taunted him with the dark weakness of his Passion: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him." But the thief, though on the cross, recognized him from the cross, and proclaimed his total innocence: "What evil has this man done?" he asked. In the same moment he bore witness to his kingly majesty, saying: "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." The centurion knew him, and called him the Son of God. The Church recognizes him, and strives to imitate his blackness that she may participate in his beauty. She is not ashamed to be seen as black, to be called black, for she can then say to her beloved: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." But make sure the blackness is that of Solomon's curtains, on the outside and not within, for my Solomon bears no blackness within. Nor does she say: "I am black like Solomon," but "as the curtains of Solomon," for the blackness of the true Peaceful One is merely external. The blackness of sin is within; sin defiles the interior before it becomes visible to the eyes. "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, theft, murder, adultery, fornication, blasphemy, and these are what defile a man;" but this cannot apply to Solomon. You will never find these kinds of defilement in the true Peaceful One. For he who takes away the sins of the world has to be without sin; if he is to be found fit to reconcile sinners he must duly vindicate for himself the name of Solomon.

12. But there is another blackness, that of the endurance of penance, as when a man decides to express sorrow for his sins. Solomon will not recoil if I bear such a blackness in me, if I willingly assume it because of my sins, for "you will not scorn this crushed and broken heart, O God." There is also the blackness of compassion, when you condole with a brother in his suffering and his trouble fills you with gloom. This, too, our Peaceful One must not think of rejecting. Did he not himself graciously undergo it on our behalf, when he "bore our sins in his body on the tree." And there is the blackness of persecution, to be regarded as a most noble adornment when endured in the cause of right and truth. For that reason "the apostles went out from the Council rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer indignity for the name of Jesus." And "happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right." I think that the Church glories especially in her free choice of this dark covering from the curtains of her Bridegroom. In any case she has been promised: "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

VI. 13. Because this is so the bride goes on: "Do not gaze at me because I am swarthy, because the sun has scorched me," meaning: Do not condemn me as repulsive, because you do not find me attractive under stress of persecution, nor adorned according to worldly standards of beauty. Why reproach me for blackness caused by the heat of persecution, not by the shame of evil living? Or perhaps by the sun she means zeal for what is right, by which she is aroused and armed against evil-doers, saying to God: "Zeal for your house has eaten me up;" and "My zeal consumes me, because my foes forget your words;" or again: "Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked who forsake your law;" or this: "Lord, do I not hate those who hate you, and have I not languished over your enemies?" She even carefully notes those words of the Wise Man: "Do you have daughters? Do not show yourself too indulgent with them;" that is when they are negligent and lax and averse to discipline, beware of greeting them with a face serenely bright; let it be severely dark. To be discolored by the sun may also mean to be on fire with fraternal love, to weep with those who weep, to rejoice with those who rejoice, to be weak with those who are weak, to burn with indignation when someone is led into sin. She can also say this: "Christ the Sun of justice had made me swarthy in color, because I am faint with love of him." This languor drains the color from the countenance, and makes the soul swoon with desire, and therefore she says: "I remembered God and was delighted, I meditated and my spirit failed me." Just like a burning sun therefore, the ardor of desire darkens her complexion while still a pilgrim in the body; rebuffs make her impatient, and delay torments her love, while she sighs for the brightness of his countenance. Which of us so burns with holy love that in his longing to see Christ he wearies of all the colorfulness of this world's prestige and gaiety and casts it from him, declaring as the Prophet did: "You know I have not desired man's day." And with David: "My soul refused to be comforted," it scorned to be tainted with the empty joy of this world's goods. Well may she say: the sun has discolored me by the contrast of its splendor; when I draw near to it I see myself in its light to be dusky, even black, and I despise my filthiness. But otherwise I am truly beautiful. Why do you term swarthy one who yields only to the sun in loveliness? The words that follow, however, seem to suggest the former meaning, for she adds: "My mother's sons turned their anger on me," to show that she had suffered persecution. But here we have come to the starting-point of another sermon. Sufficient for this occasion is all that we have received as a gift of the Church's Bridegroom concerning his glory. He is God, blessed for ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 29 ON DISCORD IN THE CHURCH AND IN COMMUNITIES**

"My mother's sons turned their anger to me." Annas and Caiaphas, and Judas Iscariot, were sons of the Synagogue; and from the Church's very origin these fought with great bitterness against her, daughter of the Synagogue though she was, and hanged Jesus, her Founder, on a tree. In that moment God fulfilled through their agency what he had formerly foretold through the Prophet: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." And perhaps it is the voice of that Church we hear in the song of Hezekiah: "My life is cut off, as by a weaver; while I was yet but beginning he cut me off." It is about these and others of that same race who are known to have opposed the Christian name, that the bride complains when she says: "My mother's sons turned their anger on me." Well did she call them sons of her mother and not of her father, for they did not have God for their father but the devil; they were murderers, just as he was a murderer from the beginning. Hence she does not say: "my brother," or "the sons of my father," but: "My mother's sons turned their anger on me." If she had failed to make this distinction, even the Apostle Paul would seem to be included among those of whom she complains, for he once persecuted the Church of God. But because while living as an unbeliever he had acted in ignorance, he received the grace of mercy; and so he exemplified that he had God for father, that he was a brother of the Church both on his Father's side and on his mother's side.

2. Take note how she accuses by name only her mother's sons as if they alone were at fault. But has she not also suffered very much from strangers? For the Prophet says: "Often since I was young have men attacked me," and "they scored my back with scourges." Why then do you complain so particularly about your mother's sons, when you are so well aware that men of various races have so often assailed you? "If you take your seat at a great man's table, take careful note of what you have before you." Brothers, we are seated at the table of Solomon. Who is more wealthy than Solomon? I do not refer to earthy riches, although Solomon has plenty even of these; but I want you to contemplate the table now before you that is spread with heaven's own delicacies. Refreshments both spiritual and divine are set before us here. "Take careful note, therefore," he said, "of what you have before you, knowing that you must in turn prepare a similar table." And so, with all possible care, I study what is set before me in these words of the bride, and for my own instruction and security take note that persecution by members of the household is alone mentioned by name, whereas

she passes over in silence numerous and grave trials which she is known to endure all over the world from every nation under heaven, from pagans, from heretics and schismatics. Aware as I am of the discernment of the bride, I know it was neither by chance nor through forgetfulness that she omitted these. The truth is that she expresses her grief so openly about what hurts her so acutely, and what she thinks we must use all vigilance to avoid. And what is it that hurts her? It is domestic quarreling, dissension within. In the Gospel you are clearly informed of this from our Savior's own mouth when he says: "A man's enemies will be those of his own household." The Prophet speaks in like manner: "Even my intimate friend, who shared my table, rebels against me." And again: "Were it an enemy who insulted me, I could put up with that; had a rival got the better of me, I could hide from him. But you, a man one with me, my leader and my friend, who enjoyed my meals with me," that is to say: I feel more keenly, I bear more painfully, what I have to suffer from you, my guest and companion. You know who makes this complaint, and about whom.

3. You can see that the bride complains about her mother's sons with a similar sorrow and in a similar spirit when she says: "My mother's sons turned their anger on me." She repeats the sentiment on another occasion: "My friends and my neighbors drew near and stood against me."

II. I ask you earnestly to keep ever far from you this abominable and detestable vice, you who have experienced and do daily experience "how good and how delightful it is for all to live together like brothers," provided that the end is union and not mutual offence. Otherwise it will be neither delightful nor good, but a great misfortune, a cause of great injury. Alas for that man who disturbs the sweet bond of unity! Whoever he may be he will certainly "bear his judgment." Rather let me die than hear any of you justly complaining: "My mother's sons turned their anger on me." Are you not all sons of this community, like sons of the same mother, all brothers to each other? What outside influence can upset you or make you sad, if you are well disposed to each other within and live in peace like brothers? "Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is right?" Therefore, "be ambitious for the higher gifts," that you may prove yourselves to be men of good zeal. The gift that excels all others, that is clearly incomparable, is love, a truth which the heavenly Bridegroom is so often at pains to impress on his new bride. At one time he says: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." At another time: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another;" and again: "This is my

commandment that you love one another," while at the same time he prays that they may be one, as he and the Father are one. Does not Paul himself, who invites you to the better gifts, introduce love among them as being with faith and hope surpassingly greater than knowledge? And when he enumerates the many wonderful gifts of heavenly grace, does he not finally direct us to that more excellent way, which he defines as no other than love? In short, what may we consider comparable to this gift, which is preferred even to martyrdom and to the faith that moves mountains? This therefore is what I say: May peace be yours as the fruit of your zeal, and anything that may threaten from without will not intimidate you because it will not injure you. And on the other hand, though the world outside may smile on you, the solace it offers will be in vain if, God forbid, the seed of discord sprouts in your midst.

4. Therefore my very dear brothers, preserve peace among you, and beware of offending each other, whether by deed or word or any gesture whatever, lest someone, provoked and surprised by passion in a moment of weakness, should be constrained to invoke God against those who injured or saddened him, and impetuously cry out this grave accusation: "My mother's sons turned their anger on me." For those who sin against a brother sin against Christ who said: "In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me." Nor is it enough to avoid only the more serious offences, for example, public insult and abuse or the venomous slander in secret. It is not enough, I say, to guard one's tongue from these and similar kinds of nastiness; even slight offences must be avoided, if anything may be termed slight that is directed against a brother for the purpose of hurting him, since merely to be angry with one's brother makes one liable to the judgment of God. And justly so. Because what you regard as slight, and therefore commit with all the more ease, will be seen in a different light by another, just as a man looking at the outward appearance and judging according to the outward appearance, is prepared to think a splinter to be a plank, and a spark a blazing fire. The love which believes all things is not the gift of all men. A man's heart and thoughts are more prone to suspect evil than to believe good, especially when the obligation of silence does not permit you, whose conduct is in question, to defend yourself, nor him who suspects you to lay bare the wound from which he suffers, that it might be healed. And so he endures the agony, grieving in his heart, till he succumbs from the secret and deadly wound, totally immersed in anger and bitterness, his mind a whirl of unvoiced thoughts on the injury he has received. He cannot pray, he cannot read, nor meditate on anything holy or spiritual. And while this soul for

whom Christ died is cut off from the vital influence of the Spirit, and goes to its death through lack of the nourishment it needs, what, I ask, are the thoughts of your own mind in the meantime? What can you find in prayer, or in any work you do, when Christ is sorrowfully crying out against you from the heart of your brother whom you have embittered, saying: "My mother's son is fighting against me, he who enjoyed my meals with me has filled me with bitterness."

5. And if you say that he should not be so gravely perturbed for so slight a cause, I answer: the more slight it is, the more easy for you not to have done it. Furthermore, as I have said already, I do not understand how you call slight something that is more than the feeling of anger, since you have heard from the judge's own mouth that even this is liable to be judged. Just think! And then will you call slight a gesture that offends Christ, that will bring you before the judgement seat of God, since "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"? So when an offence is committed against you, a thing hard to avoid at times in communities like ours, do not immediately rush, as a worldly person may do, to retaliate dishonorably against your brother; nor, under the guise of administering correction, should you dare to pierce with sharp and searing words one for whom Christ was pleased to be crucified; nor make grunting, resentful noises at him, nor mutter and murmur complaints, nor adopt a sneering air, nor indulge the loud laugh of contempt, nor knit the brow in menacing anger. Let your passion die within, where it was born; a carrier of death, it must be allowed no exit or it will cause destruction, and then you can say with the Prophet: "I was troubled and I spoke not. "

III. 6. I understand that there are some who give a more mysterious meaning to the words of our text by applying them to the devil and his angels, who were once sons of that Jerusalem above which is our mother and who, since their fall, do not cease to fight against their sister, the Church. Nor will I argue with anyone who finds it more acceptable to see here a reference to those spiritual men in the Church who make war with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, against their impious brothers, wounding them for their salvation and leading them on to spiritual things by this kind of assault. "Let a good man strike or rebuke me in kindness," wounding and healing, killing and bringing to life, so that even I may dare to say: "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me." "Come to terms with your opponent," says Christ, "while you are still on the way to court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the torturer." I shall have found a good opponent if after I have come to terms with him, there will be

neither judge to speak against me nor torturer. And indeed if some of you have been saddened by me in the past for this reason, I do not regret it; the sadness was for their salvation. I certainly cannot recall ever having done it without experiencing great sadness myself, such as Christ referred to when he said: "A woman in childbirth suffers." But let me no longer remember my anguish, now that I enjoy the fruit of my pain, seeing Christ formed in my offspring." And these, who have convalesced from their weakness after and by means of many corrections, are, I know not how, bound to me by a more tender love than those who have remained strong from the beginning, without need of this kind of remedy.

7. It is in this sense that the Church, or the soul who loves God, can say that the sun has changed her color by commissioning and equipping some of her mother's sons to make salutary warfare against her, and lead her captive to his faith and love, pierced with those arrows of which Scripture says: "The warrior's arrows are sharp," and again: "Your arrows have pierced deep into me." Hence she goes on to say: "There is no soundness in my flesh;" but because, as a consequence, she has grown more sound and courageous in spirit, she is able to affirm: "The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak." Her sentiments are those of Paul: "It is when I am weak that I am strong." Do you see how physical infirmity can be an occasion for increasing spiritual strength, a source of new spiritual powers. On the other hand you know that physical strength can beget weakness of the spirit. What wonder if the enemy's weakness makes you stronger, unless in your madness you make friends with a nature that ever lusts against the spirit? See then, if the Saint who, for his own good, demands to be attacked and pierced with arrows, is not acting prudently when he says: "Pierce my flesh with your fear." How excellent that arrow of fear that pierces and kills the desires of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved. Is it not obvious to you that he who chastises his body and subdues it, is aiding the hand that fights against his lower nature?

IV. 8. There is another arrow: the living and active word of God that cuts more keenly than any two-edged sword, of which our Savior said: "I have not come to send peace but the sword." "A polished arrow" too is that special love of Christ, which not only pierced Mary's soul but penetrated through and through, so that even the tiniest space in her virginal breast was permeated by love. Thenceforth she would love with her whole heart, her whole soul and her whole strength, and be full of grace. It transpierced her thus that it might come down even to us, and

of that fullness we might all receive. She would become the mother of that love whose father is the God who is love; and when that love was brought to birth he would place his tent in the sun, that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "I will make you the Light of the Nations, so that you may be my salvation to the ends of the earth." This was fulfilled through Mary, who brought forth in visible flesh him whom she conceived invisibly, neither from the flesh nor by means of the flesh. In the process she experienced through her whole being a wound of love that was mighty and sweet; and I would reckon myself happy if at rare moments I felt at least the prick of the point of that sword. Even if only bearing love's slightest wound, I could still say: "I am wounded with love." How I long not only to be wounded in this manner but to be assailed again and again till the color and heat of that flesh that wars against the spirit is overcome.

9. If worldly-minded maidens should taunt a person undergoing this trial, and say how unsightly she is and devoid of good color, does it not seem to you that she can reply very aptly: "Take no notice of my swarthy skin, it is the sun that has burnt me." And if such a person bears in mind that she has arrived at this state through the exhortations and remonstrations of God's servants who "feel a divine jealousy" for her, may she not as a consequence say in truth: "My mother's sons turned their anger on me." The Church or any person inspired by true zeal will speak in this way, using this meaning, not in a mood of grief or complaint, but in joy and thanksgiving and a spirit of triumph that she has been found worthy both to become and to be called dark and unsightly for the name and love of Christ. And this she attributes not to her own merits but to the grace and mercy of the God who anticipated her needs and sent her his preachers. For how could she believe without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? Not with resentment but with gratitude does she recall that her mother's sons turned their anger on her. Hence what follows: "They made me look after the vineyards." If this statement is examined from the spiritual viewpoint I cannot see that it bears any trace of discontent or rancor, but rather of pleasure. In order to carry out this examination however, and before presuming to attempt it -- "for the place is holy" -- we must offer the usual prayers to consult and win the favor of that Spirit who "searches the depths of God," and of the only-begotten Son who is in the father's bosom, Jesus Christ our Lord, the Church's Bridegroom who is blessed for ever. Amen.



## **SERMON 30 MYSTICAL VINEYARDS AND THE PRUDENCE OF THE FLESH**

"They made me the keeper of the vineyards." Who are they? Do you mean those opponents to whom you recently referred? Listen and understand. Perhaps she is saying that she has been given this charge by the very people who persecuted her. No need to wonder at this if she was attacked for the purpose of correcting her. Everybody knows that lots of people are frequently opposed in a well-intentioned way for their good. Every day we meet with people whose ideals are purified, who advance to perfection through the friendly corrections of their superiors. Therefore let us rather show, if we can, how her mother's sons fight against the Church with hostile purpose and with a loss that is her gain. This is matter for wonder, that they whose purpose is to harm her, do her good despite themselves. The interpretation just given covers both of these meanings, because the Church has never lacked opponents who were either well disposed or evilly disposed toward her. Though their motives for attacking her differed, each worked to her advantage. And if she rejoiced in what she suffered from her rivals, it is because for the one vineyard of which they seemed to deprive her, she has been compensated by being placed over many. "By fighting against me and my vineyard," she says, "those who cried out: 'Raze it, raze it! down to its foundations!' have given me the opportunity of exchanging one vineyard for many." This is what she implies when she says: "My own vineyard I have not kept," as if explaining why it has happened that she is no longer in charge of one but of several vineyards. This, in effect, is what the text says.

2. But if we follow the text's direct meaning, satisfied with what the words mean as they stand, we shall imagine we are reading in our holy Scripture about those material and earthly vineyards that draw daily nourishment from the dew of heaven and the fertile soil, whence they produce the wine that ministers to wantonness. But by doing this we shall have deduced from writings so holy and divine nothing worthy not merely of the bride of the Lord, but even of any of her companions. For what is there in common between brides and a keeper of vineyards? But if they should seem to have points in common, shall we teach as a consequence that the Church was once commissioned with a duty of this kind? Is it for vineyards that God is concerned? But if, in a spiritual sense, we understand the vineyards to be the churches, to be the peoples who are believers, as the Prophet did when he said: "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel," it will begin to dawn on us that it is by no means unbecoming

for the bride to be made a keeper in the vineyards.

3. It seems to me that here we encounter a significant prerogative. Note in a special way how the Church extended her boundaries into vineyards of this kind all over the world, from that day on which she was attacked by her mother's sons in Jerusalem, and banished from it along with her first new plantation - that company of believers who were described as "of one heart and soul." This is the vineyard which she now says she has not kept, but not to her discredit. For during the persecution it had not been so uprooted that it could not be elsewhere replanted and leased "to other tenants who will deliver the produce to her when the season arrives."

II. No indeed, it did not perish, it changed to a new location; it even increased and spread further afield under the blessing of the Lord. So lift up your eyes round about and see if the mountains were not covered with its shade, the cedars of God with its branches; if its tendrils did not extend to the sea and its offshoots all the way to the river. No matter for wonder this: it is God's building, God's farm. He waters it, he propagates it, prunes and cleanses it that it may bear more fruit. When did he ever deprive of his care and labor that which his right hand planted? There can be no question of neglect where the apostles are the branches, the Lord is the vine, and his Father is the vine dresser. Planted in faith, its roots are grounded in love, dug in with the hoe of discipline, fertilized with penitential tears, watered with the words of preachers, and so it abounds with the wine that inspires joy rather than debauchery, wine full of the pleasure that is never licentious. This is the wine that gladdens man's heart, the wine that even the angels drink with gladness. In their thirst for men's salvation they rejoice in the conversion and repentance of sinners. Sinners' tears are wine to them; their sorrow has the flavor of grace, the relish of pardon, the delight of reconciliation, the wholesomeness of returning innocence, the gratification of a peaceful conscience.

4. And so, from one vineyard, that seemed to have been destroyed by the storm of savage persecution, what a vast number have been propagated and flourish all over the world! And over all these the bride has been appointed keeper, that she may not be saddened for having failed to keep her first vineyard. Be consoled, daughter of Zion: if one section of Israel has become blind, what is your loss? Yours is to wonder at the mystery rather than bewail the harm; let your heart be expanded to gather together the fullness of the pagans. "Say to the

towns of Judah:" `we had to proclaim the word of God to you first, but since you have rejected it, since you do not think yourselves worthy of eternal life, we must turn to the pagans.'" God made an offer to Moses that if he were willing to abandon a people grown disloyal, and expose them to the divine vengeance, he himself would be made the father of a great nation. But Moses refused. Why? Because of the all-surpassing love that bound him irresistibly to them and because he would not pursue his own interests but the honor of God, nor seek his own advantage but that of many. That's the sort of man Moses was.

5. The idea strikes me however, that by a secret design of Providence, this magnificent project was reserved for the bride: she, and not Moses, would beget a mighty race. It was not fitting that the friend of the Bridegroom should seize in advance what was the bride's prerogative; hence not Moses but the new bride received the command: "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation." It was she who obviously received the mission to found a mighty race. What more could she achieve than to spread over the whole world? And the whole world readily yielded to one who was a bearer of peace, who came offering grace. But what a difference between grace and the law! What a contrast of features as they present themselves to the conscience, the one so pleasant, the other so austere! Who can look with equal regard on one who condemns and one who counsels, one who holds to account and one who pardons, one who punishes and one who embraces? One does not welcome with equal ardor the darkness and the light, anger and peace, judgment and mercy, the shadow and the substance, the rod and the reward, the curb and the kiss. The hands of Moses were heavy, as Aaron and Hur well knew; the yoke of the law was heavy, as witnessed by the Apostles themselves who proclaimed that neither they nor their ancestors could carry it; the yoke was heavy, the reward paltry: the land was but a thing of promise. Moses, therefore, was not destined to produce a mighty race. But you, the Church who is our mother, holding out the reward of life here and now and of the future life as well, will find ready welcome everywhere because of the twofold grace you bring: a yoke that is easy to bear a kingdom that is sublime. Expelled from Jerusalem, you are received all over the world, wherever your promises attract men so that your laws do not alarm them. Why then still lament the loss of one vineyard when you have been so abundantly compensated? "No longer will you be deserted, a wife hated and unvisited; I will make you an eternal pride and a never-ending joy. You shall suck the milk of nations, and be suckled at the breasts of kings. So you shall know that I the Lord am your deliverer, your ransom the mighty one of Jacob." This then is what the

bride means when she says she was made keeper of the vineyards, and that she had failed to keep her own.

III. 6. I scarcely ever read these words without finding fault with myself for having undertaken the care of souls, I who am not fit to take care of my own soul: here I speak of souls as vineyards. If you approve of this interpretation may we not consequently and appropriately call faith the vine, the virtues the branches, good works the cluster of grapes, and devotion the wine. Without the vine there is no wine; without faith there is no virtue. "Without faith it is impossible to please God," perhaps one cannot help but displease him, for "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." Those people therefore who made me keeper of the vineyards should have taken into account how I had kept my own. For how long a time was it uncultivated and abandoned, reduced to a wilderness! It had failed completely to produce wine, its branches withered without the fruit of virtue because its faith was sterile. Faith was there but it was dead. Without good works how could it be otherwise? That was my life as a layman. On my conversion to the Lord I began to improve, though very little, not as much as I should have. But then, what man is fit to do this? Certainly not the holy Prophet who said: "Unless the Lord keeps watch over a city, in vain the watchman stands on guard." What attacks I remember being exposed to from him who shoots arrows at the innocent from cover! O my vineyard, what an amount of produce was robbed from me by subtle trickery, at the very time when I was growing more vigilant in my care of you! How many and how precious the clusters of good works either blighted by anger, or snatched away by boasting, or defiled by vainglory! What temptations did I not endure from gluttony, from mental slothfulness, from pusillanimity of spirit and the storm of passion! Such was my state; and yet they made me the keeper of the vineyards, failing to consider what I was doing or had done with my own; nor listening to the voice of the teacher who said: "If a man does not know how to manage a his own household, how can he care for God's Church?"

7. What amazes me is the audacity of those who seem to harvest only brambles and thistles from their own vineyards, and yet are not afraid to intrude themselves on the vineyards of the Lord. These are not keepers and vine-dressers but thieves and robbers. Enough said. But woe to me even now because of the danger to my own vineyard, and now more than ever, when I am involved in so many concerns and forced to be less attentive to the one, less careful about it. I have no opportunity to fence it round or dig a winepress there. Alas! its wall is broken down so and every passer-by can pluck its fruit! There is

nothing to shelter it from sorrow; anger and impatience make it their thoroughfare. Pressing needs like little foxes steadily destroy it; anxieties, suspicions, cares, charge in from all sides; rare is the hour when bickering groups with their tiresome quarrels are missing from my door. I have no power to prevent them, no means of evading them, not even time for prayer. Will a flood of tears be enough to fertilize the barrenness of my soul? I meant to say "of my vineyard," but quoted the Psalm through habit; it means the same thing. I do not regret a mistake that draws attention to the metaphor, for the sermon concerns the soul, not a vineyard. So when vineyard is mentioned let the soul be remembered: its barrenness deplored under the former's figure and name. Hence I ask what amount of tears will irrigate the barrenness of my vineyard. All its boughs have withered through neglect: they remain fruitless because they have no moisture. O good Jesus, well you know how they are gathered in bundles of twigs and consumed daily in your sacrifice by the burning fire of sorrow in my heart. Let the broken spirit, I implore, be a sacrifice to you: "You will not scorn this crushed and broken heart, O God."

IV. 8. On account of my imperfection then, I apply the present text in this way to myself. But a man who is perfect" will be able to give another meaning to the words: "My own vineyard I have not kept," the meaning intended by the Savior when he said in the Gospel: "Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it." It is clear that a man is fit and worthy to be in charge of vineyards when he can painstakingly apply himself to the care of the ones committed to him without let or hindrance in caring for his own, provided he does not concentrate on selfish interest, nor on what is profitable to himself, but to others. Hence Peter was made keeper of so many vineyards that were of the circumcision, because he was ready to go to prison and to death; love of his own vineyard, of his own life that is, prevented him in no way from concentrating on the care of those committed to him. Paul too was rightly entrusted with a vast forest of vineyards, because so little was he worried by concern for his own vineyard that he was ready not only to be put in bonds but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. "I dread none of these things," he said, "nor do I account my life more precious than myself." How excellent a discernment of values, when he judges that nothing he owns is to be preferred to himself.

9. Yet how many have preferred to their own salvation a pittance of worthless money. Paul preferred not even his life. "I do not account my life more precious than myself," he said. Do you make a distinction between yourself and your life,

then? You do well in seeing more worth in your self than in anything you possess. But how is it that your life is not your self? I feel that because Paul was then guided by the Spirit, and had a self that acknowledges that the Law is good, he thought it more becoming to designate this self as the principal and supreme entity in himself, rather than anything else that was his. The remaining part of his soul being clearly of an inferior nature, and therefore belonging to a lower and baser form of being, namely the body, not only because its function is to impart life and feeling to it but also to preserve and nourish it: this sensual and carnal thing is regarded by the spiritual man as unworthy to be called self. He judged it better to see it as something belonging to him rather than as adequately equipped to represent his personality. "When I say me," he said, "understand it to mean what is most excellent in me, that in which I exist by favor of God, my mind and reason. When I speak of my soul, think of that lower principle whose purpose as you see is to animate the body, and even share in its concupiscence. I once lived at that level, but not now, because I no longer walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. `I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me.' Not in the flesh but in this spirit is my true self to be found. What if the soul still experiences carnal lusts? `The thing behaving that way is not my true self but sin living in me.' And therefore I do not regard this carnal instinct as my real self, but as something possessed by my self: in other words, my sensitive soul." To express carnal love is a function of that soul, as is the life it communicates to the body. This is the life that Paul spurned for the sake of his true self, being ready not only to be put in bonds but even to die in Jerusalem" on behalf of the Lord, and in this manner to lose his life as the Lord had counseled.

10. You too, if you abandon your own will, if you fully renounce the pleasures of the body, if you crucify your lower nature with its passions and desires, and if you "put to death those parts of you which belong to the earth," will be truly doing as Paul did, since you will not account your life as more precious than yourself; by this loss that saves, you will prove yourself a follower of Christ. It is wiser to lose it in order to save it, than by saving it to lose it. "For anyone who wants to save his life, will lose it."

V. What have you to say to this, you who are so particular about your food, so unconcerned about your behavior? Hippocrates and his followers teach us to save our lives in this world, Christ and his followers teach us to lose them. Which of the two do you choose as master? But the man who complains: "This is bad for my eyes, that gives me headache, this affects my heart, that upsets my

stomach" -- he shows clearly who his master is. Each of us holds forth in the style of the master he has learned from. It was not from the Gospel, nor from the prophets, nor from the letters of the apostles, that you learned to pick and choose like this. It was flesh and blood, not the Spirit of the Father, that revealed this wisdom to you, for it is the wisdom of the flesh. But listen to what our physicians think of this kind of wisdom: "To set one's mind on the flesh," they say, "is death;" and "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God." Would you have me preach to you the doctrine of Hippocrates or Galenus, or even of the school of Epicurus? But I, a follower of Christ, am speaking to Christ's followers: if I should introduce strange doctrines here, I should be in sin. The ideal of Epicurus was the body's sensual pleasure, of Hippocrates to promote its good health, but my Master preaches contempt of these two pursuits. What each of those philosophers seeks, and teaches us to seek with all diligence -- in one case how to sustain the body's life, in the other how to pander to its enjoyment -- the Savior advises us to lose.

11. Is not this the message that pounded in your ears from the school of Christ when just now it was proclaimed: "He who loves his life loses it"? He loses it, he said, either by dying as a martyr or by chastising himself as a penitent. Certainly, it is a kind of martyrdom to put to death the deeds of the body by the power of the Spirit, less horrifying indeed than that in which the limbs are severed by the sword, but more grueling because more prolonged. Do you not see how these words of my Master condemn that wisdom of the flesh whereby a man either abandons himself to sensual indulgence or pays excessive attention to the body's health? You have heard from the Sage that true wisdom does not dissipate itself by living voluptuously; it is not found in the land of those who live for pleasure. But the one who does find it can say: "I loved wisdom more than health or beauty." If more than health or beauty, far more still than sensuality and debauchery. But why should a man bother to abstain from sensual pleasures if he spends so much time every day probing into the mysteries of the human constitution and devising ways of procuring variety in foods? "Beans," he says, "produce flatulency, cheese causes dyspepsia, milk gives me headache, water is bad for my heart, cabbages bring on melancholy, I feel choleric after onions, fish from the pond or from muddy water does not agree with my constitution." Are you not actually saying that food to your taste is not available in all the rivers, the fields, the gardens and the cellars?

12. I earnestly request that you remember you are a monk, not a physician, and

that you will be judged not on the quality of your constitution but on your profession. I beg of you to be concerned first of all for your own peace, then for the hardship you cause to those who serve you; beware of being a burden on the community, and take conscience into account. I do not mean your conscience but your neighbor's; that of the man who because of you, while he sits and eats what is placed before him, murmurs about your strange fasting. For he is scandalized by either your unwarrantable superstition or what seems the hard-heartedness of the person whose duty it is to provide for you. Your brother, I repeat, is scandalized by your strange behavior, this insistence on getting special foods that to him seems superstitious; or he will accuse me of harshness for not endeavoring to supply the nourishment you need. There are some who flatter themselves, but to no purpose, that they may follow the example of Paul who advised his disciple to give up drinking only water, and to take a little wine for the sake of his digestion and frequent bouts of illness. These ought to remember first of all that the Apostle did not prescribe such a drink for himself, and that his disciple did not ask for it. In the second place, this advice was given, not to a monk but to a bishop whose life was very necessary to the Church in its tender infancy. This was Timothy. Give me another Timothy and if it should please you I will offer him gold to eat and balsam to drink. But it is self-pity that makes you arrange for your own diet. Making your own arrangements like this seems to me suspect, I fear it is worldly wisdom masquerading in the dress and name of discretion. But let me at least remind you that if you decide to drink wine on the authority of the Apostle, you should not overlook the word "little" with which he qualified it. And so enough on that subject. But let us return to the bride and learn from her how to lose our own vineyards to our benefit, especially we who seem to be appointed keepers in the vineyards of the Bridegroom of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

### **SERMON 31 THE VARIOUS WAYS OF SEEING GOD**

"Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon?" The Word, who is the Bridegroom, often makes himself known under more than one form to those who are fervent. Why so? Doubtless because he cannot be seen yet as he is. That vision is unchanging, because the form in which he will then be seen is unchanging; for he is, and can



suffer no change determined by present, past or future. Eliminate past and future, and where then is alteration or any shadow of a change? For whatever evolves out of the past and does not cease to move toward future development, passes through the instant that is the present, but one cannot say: it is. How can one say: it is, when it never remains in the same state? That alone truly is, which is neither altered from its past mode of being nor blotted out by a future mode, but "is" alone is predicated of it impregnably and unchangeably, and it remains what it is. No reference to the past can deny that it is from all eternity, nor any reference to the future that it is for all eternity. In this way it proves that it truly is, that is, it is uncreated, interminable, immutable. When he therefore who exists in this manner - who, furthermore, cannot be one moment in this form, another in that - is seen just as he is, that vision endures, as I have said, since no alteration interrupts it. This is the moment when that one denarius mentioned in the Gospel is given in the one vision that is offered to everyone who sees. For as he who is seen is immutable in himself, he is present immutably to all who contemplate him; to these there is nothing more desirable that they wish to see, nothing more enticing that they could see. Can their eager appetite, then, ever grow weary, or that sweetness ebb away, or that truth prove deceptive, or that eternity come to a close? And if both the ability and will to contemplate are prolonged eternally, what is lacking to total happiness? Those who contemplate him without ceasing are short of nothing, those whose wills are fixed on him have nothing more to desire.

2. But this vision is not for the present life; it is reserved for the next, at least for those who can say: "We know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Even now he appears to whom he pleases, but as he pleases, not as he is. Neither sage nor saint nor prophet can or could ever see him as he is, while still in this mortal body; but whoever is found worthy will be able to do so when the body becomes immortal. Hence, though he is seen here below, it is in the form that seems good to him, not as he is. For example, take that mighty source of light, I speak of that sun which you see day after day; yet you do not see it as it is, but according as it lights up the air, or a mountain, or a wall. Nor could you see even to this extent if the light of your body, the eye, because of its natural steadiness and clearness, did not bear some degree of likeness to that light in the heavens. Since all the other members of the body lack this likeness, they are incapable of seeing the light. Even the eye itself, when troubled, cannot approach the light, because it has lost that likeness. Just as the troubled eye, then, cannot gaze on the peaceful sun because of its unlikeness,

so the peaceful eye can behold it with some efficacy because of a certain likeness. If indeed it were wholly equal to it in purity, with a completely clear vision it would see it as it is, because of the complete likeness. And so when you are enlightened you can see even now the Sun of Justice that "enlightens every man who comes into this world," according to the degree of the light he gives, by which you are made somehow like him; but see him as he is you cannot, because not yet perfectly like him. That is why the Psalmist says: "Come to him and be enlightened, and your faces shall never be ashamed." That is very true, provided we are enlightened as much as we need, so that "with our unveiled faces contemplating the glory of God, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the same image, as by the spirit of the Lord."

3. Note that we must approach gently, not intrude ourselves upon him, lest the irreverent searcher of majesty be overwhelmed by glory. This approach is not a movement from place to place but from brightness to brightness, not in the body but in the spirit, as by the Spirit of the Lord; evidently by the spirit of the Lord, not by ours, although in ours. The brighter one becomes, the nearer is the end; and to be absolutely bright is to have arrived. For those thus arrived in his presence, to see him as he is means to be as he is, and not to be put to shame by any form of unlikeness. But, as I have said, this is for the next life.

II. In the meantime this immense variety of forms, these countless species of creatures, what are they but rays emanating from the Godhead, showing that he from whom they come truly is, but not fully explaining what he is. Hence what you see is what emanates from him, not himself. Nevertheless, though not seeing himself but what comes from him, you are made aware beyond all doubt that he exists, and that you must seek him. Grace will not be wanting to the seeker, nor ignorance excuse the negligent. All have access to this kind of vision. According to the Apostle Paul, it is common to everyone who has the use of reason: "The invisible attributes of God have been clearly perceived in the things that have been made."

4. Another kind of vision is that by which in former times the Fathers were often graciously admitted to sweet communion with God, who became present to them, though they did not see him as he is but only in the form he thought fitting to assume. Nor does he appear to all in a similar manner, but as the Apostle says: "in many and various ways," still remaining one in himself, in accord with his word to Israel: "The Lord your God is one God." This manifestation, though

not apparent to everybody, took place exteriorly, and consisted of images or the spoken word. But there is another form of divine contemplation, very different from the former because it takes place in the interior, when God himself is pleased to visit the soul that seeks him, provided it is committed to seeking him with all its desire and love. We are told what the sign of such a visit is, by one who experienced it. "Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries round about." The fire of holy desire ought to precede his advent to every soul whom he will visit, to burn up the rust of bad habits and so prepare a place for the Lord. The soul will know that the Lord is near when it perceives itself to be aflame with that fire, and can say as the Prophet did: "He has sent a fire from on high down into my bones, and enlightened me;" and again: "My heart became hot within me and in my meditation fire burst forth."

5. When the Beloved who is thus sought for pays a visit in his merciful love to the soul that is filled with longing, that prays often, even without intermission, that humiliates itself in the ardor of its desire, that soul may fittingly say with St Jeremiah: "You are good, O Lord, to those who hope in you, to the soul that seeks you." And that soul's angel, one of the friends of the Bridegroom, and by him commissioned to be the minister and witness of that secret and mutual exchange - that angel, I say, must be dancing with joy! Does he not participate in their gladness and bliss, and turning to the Lord, say: "I thank you, Lord of majesty, because `you have granted him his heart's desire, not denied him what his lips entreated' "? He is everywhere the soul's tireless attendant, never ceasing to lure it on and guide it with constant inspirations, as he whispers: "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desire of your heart;" and again: "Wait for the Lord and keep his way." Or: "If he seems slow, wait for him; he will surely come, he will not delay." Turning to the Lord, he says: " `As a hart longs for flowing streams, so that soul longs for you, O God.' It has yearned for you in the night, and your Spirit within it watched for you from morning onwards." And again: "All the day this soul reaches out to you; grant what it wants because it is shouting after you; relent a little and show your mercy. Look down from heaven and see, and visit this desolate spirit." This loyal groomsman, watching without envy over this interchange of love, seeks the Lord's glory rather than his own; he is the go-between for the lover and his beloved, making known the desires of one, bearing the gifts of the other. He quickens the soul's affections, he conciliates the Bridegroom. Sometimes too, though rarely, he brings them into each other's presence, either snatching her up to him, or leading him down to her: for he is a member of the household, a familiar figure in the palace, one who

has no fear of being rebuffed, who daily sees the face of the Father.

6. Be careful, however, not to conclude that I see something corporeal or perceptible to the senses in this union between the Word and the soul. My opinion is that of the Apostle, who said that "he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him." I try to express with the most suitable words I can muster the ecstatic ascent of the purified mind to God, and the loving descent of God into the soul, submitting spiritual truths to spiritual men. Therefore let this union be in the spirit, because "God is a spirit," who is lovingly drawn by the beauty of that soul whom he perceives to be guided by the Spirit, and devoid of any desire to submit to the ways of the flesh, especially if he sees that it burns with love for himself.

III. One who is so disposed and so beloved will by no means be content either with that manifestation of the Bridegroom given to the many in the world of creatures, or to the few in visions and dreams. By a special privilege she wants to welcome him down from heaven into her inmost heart, into her deepest love; she wants to have the one she desires present to her not in bodily form but by inward infusion, not by appearing externally but by laying hold of her within. It is beyond question that the vision is all the more delightful the more inward it is, and not external. It is the Word, who penetrates without sound; who is effective though not pronounced, who wins the affections without striking on the ears. His face, though without form, is the source of form, it does not dazzle the eyes of the body but gladdens the watchful heart; its pleasure is in the gift of love and not in the color of the lover.

7. Not yet have I come round to saying that he has appeared as he is, although in this inward vision he does not reveal himself as altogether different from what he is. Neither does he make his presence continuously felt, not even to his most ardent lovers, nor in the same way to all. For the various desires of the soul it is essential that the taste of God's presence be varied too, and that the infused flavor of divine delight should titillate in manifold ways the palate of the soul that seeks him. You must already have noticed how often he changes his countenance in the course of this love-song, how he delights in transforming himself from one charming guise to another in the beloved's presence: at one moment like a bashful bridegroom maneuvering for the hidden embraces of his holy lover, for the bliss of her kisses; at another coming along like a physician with oil and ointments, because weak and tender souls still need remedies and

medicines of this kind, which is why they are rather daintily described as maidens. Should anybody find fault with this, let him be told that "it is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick." Sometimes, too, he joins up as a traveler with the bride and the maidens who accompany her on the road, and lightens the hardships of the journey for the whole company by his fascinating conversation, so that when he has parted from them they ask: "Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road?" A silver-tongued companion who, by the spell of his words and manners, persuades everyone, as if in a sweet-smelling cloud arising from the ointments, to follow him. Hence they say: "We will run after you in the odor of your ointments." At another time he comes to meet them as a wealthy father of a family "with bread enough and to spare" in his house; or again like a magnificent and powerful king, giving courage to his timid and poverty-stricken bride, stirring up her desire by showing her the ornaments of his glory, the riches of his wine-presses and storehouse, the produce of his gardens and fields, and finally introducing her into his private apartments. For "her husband's heart has confidence in her," and among all his possessions there is nothing that he thinks should be hidden from her whom he redeemed from indigence, whose fidelity he has proved, whose attractiveness wins his embraces. And so he never ceases, in one way or another, to reveal himself to the inward eye of those who seek him, thus fulfilling the promise that he made: "Be assured I am with you always, to the end of time."

8. On all these occasions he is kind and gentle, full of merciful love. In his kisses he shows that he is both loving and charming; with the oil and the ointments that he is boundlessly considerate and compassionate and forgiving; on the journey he is gay, courteous, ever gracious and ready to help; in the display of his riches and possessions he reveals a kingly liberality, a munificent generosity in the bestowal of rewards. Through the whole context of this song you will find images of this nature to delineate the Word. Hence I feel that the Prophet was thinking on these lines when he said: "Christ the Lord is a spirit before our face; under his shadow we shall live among the nations," because now we see in a mirror dimly and not yet face to face. So it will be while we live among the nations; among the angels it will be otherwise. For then we shall enjoy the very same happiness as they; even we shall see him as he is, in the form of God, no longer in shadow.

IV. Just as we say that our ancestors possessed only shadows and images, whereas the truth itself shines on us by the grace of Christ present in the flesh, so also no one will deny that in relation to the world to come, we still live in the

shadow of the truth, unless he wishes to deny what the apostle asserts: "our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect;" or when he says: "I do not reckon myself to have got hold of it yet." Why should there not be a distinction between him who walks by faith and him who walks by sight? Hence the just man lives by faith, the blessed rejoices in the vision; the holy person here below lives in the shadow of Christ, the holy angel above is glorified in the splendor of his shining countenance.

9. That the faith is shadowy is a blessing, it tempers the light to the eye's weakness and prepares the eye for the light; for it is written: "He cleansed their hearts by faith." Faith therefore does not quench the light but protects it. Whatever it may be that the angel sees, is preserved for me by the shadow of faith, stored up in its trusty breast, until it be revealed in due time. If you cannot yet grasp the naked truth is it not worthwhile to possess it wrapped in a veil? Our Lord's Mother herself lived in the shadow of faith, for she was told: "Blessed are you who believed." Even the body of Christ was a shadow for her, as implied in the words: "The power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow." That is no mean shadow which is formed by the power of the Most High. Assuredly there was power in the flesh of Christ that overshadowed the Virgin, since by means of the envelope of his vivifying body she was able to bear his majestic presence, and endure the unapproachable light, a thing impossible to mortal woman. That was power indeed by which every opposing might was overcome. Both the power and the shadow put the demons to flight and became a shelter for men: an invigorating power surely, a shadow radiating coolness.

10. We therefore who walk by faith live in the shadow of Christ; we are fed with his flesh as the source of our life. For Christ's flesh is real food. And perhaps for that reason he is now described here as appearing in the guise of a shepherd, when the bride addresses him as though one of the shepherds: "Tell me where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon." The Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep! He gives them his life, he gives them his flesh; his life their ransom, his flesh their food. How wonderful! He is their shepherd, their food, their redemption. But this sermon is getting too long, the subject is extensive and contains great truths that cannot be explained in a few words. This necessitates that we break off rather than finish off. Since the matter is merely suspended we must keep it alive in our memories, so as to resume soon again where we have left off, and continue it with the aid of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's Bridegroom, who is God blessed for ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 32 HOW CHRIST ADAPTS HIS GRACES TO PERSONAL NEEDS**

"Tell me where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon." This is where we are, from here we proceed. But before I begin to treat of these words and the vision they imply, I think we should summarize briefly the other visions that preceded it, and see how they can be applied spiritually to us according to each one's desires and merits. If we receive the grace to understand these, we shall more easily find light on the matter we are about to discuss. For we are faced with a difficult task. The words that describe these visions or images seem to refer to bodies or bodily substances, yet they are means of conveying spiritual truths to us, and hence there must be a spiritual character to our enquiry into their causes and meaning. And who is qualified to investigate and comprehend those countless affective movements of the soul caused by the presence of the Bridegroom dispensing his multiform graces? Yet if we turn our gaze to our interior, and if the Holy Spirit will be pleased to give us his light to see the fruits that by his action he constantly produces within us, I think we shall not remain entirely devoid of understanding about these mysteries. For I trust that "we have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God."

2. If then, any of us, like the holy Prophet, finds that it is good to cling close to God, and -- that I may make my meaning more clear -- if any of us is so filled with desires that he wants to depart and to be with Christ, with a desire that is intense, a thirst ever burning, an application that never flags, he will certainly meet the Word in the guise of a Bridegroom on whatever day he comes. At such an hour he will find himself locked in the arms of Wisdom; he will experience how sweet divine love is as it flows into his heart. His heart's desire will be given to him, even while still a pilgrim on earth, though not in its fullness and only for a time, a short time. For when after vigils and prayers and a great shower of tears he who was sought presents himself, suddenly he is gone again, just when we think we hold him fast. But he will present himself anew to the soul that pursues him with tears, he will allow himself to be taken hold of but not detained, for suddenly a second time he flees from between our hands. And if the fervent soul persists with prayers and tears, he will return each time and not defraud him of his express desire, but only to disappear soon again and not to return unless he is sought for with all one's heart. And so, even in this body we can often enjoy the happiness of the Bridegroom's presence, but it is a happiness that is never

complete because the joy of the visit is followed by the pain at his departure. The beloved has no choice but to endure this state until the hour when she lays down the body's weary weight, and raised aloft on the wings of desire, freely traverses the meadows of contemplation, and in spirit follows the One she loves without restraint wherever he goes.

3. Nevertheless, he will not reveal himself in this way to every person, even momentarily, but only to the one who is proved to be a worthy bride by intense devotion, vehement desire and the sweetest affection. And the Word who comes to visit will be clothed in beauty, in every aspect a Bridegroom.

II. But the person who has not yet been raised to this state, who smarts at the remembrance of past deeds and says to God in bitterness of soul: "Do not condemn me," or who may still be caught up in the snare of his own evil propensities, still perilously tempted, this person needs a physician, not a bridegroom; hence kisses and embraces are not for him, but only oil and ointments, remedies for his wounds. Is not this how we too often feel? Is not this our experience at prayer, we who are tempted daily by our passions and filled with remorse for our past sins? O good Jesus, from what great bitterness have you not freed me by your coming, time after time? When distress has made me weep, when untold sobs and groans have shaken me, have you not anointed my wounded conscience with the ointment of your mercy and poured in the oil of gladness? How often has not prayer raised me from the brink of despair and made me feel happy in the hope of pardon? All who have had these experiences know well that the Lord Jesus is a physician indeed, "who heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds." And those who cannot lay claim to experience must for that very reason put their trust in him when he says: "The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me, he has sent me to bring good news to the humble, to bind up the broken-hearted." And if they should still be in doubt, let them draw near and put it to the test and so learn by inward experience what this means: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." But let us pursue the subject.

4. When men grow weary of studying spiritual doctrine and become lukewarm -- when their spiritual energies are drained away, then they walk in sadness along the ways of the Lord. They fulfill the tasks enjoined on them with hearts that are tired and arid, they grumble without ceasing, they complain of the long days and the long nights in words like those of Job: "When I lie down I say: 'When shall I arise?' And then I shall be waiting for evening." If when we are subject to these



moods, the compassionate Lord draws near to us on the way we are traveling, and being from heaven begins to talk to us about heavenly truths, sings our favourite air from among the songs of Zion, discourses on the city of God, on the peace of that city, on the eternity of that peace and on the life that is eternal, I assure you that this happy discourse will bear along as in a carriage the man who has grown tired and listless; it drives all trace of aversion from the hearer's mind and weariness from his body. Does it not seem that this is what was felt, this is what was asked for by the man who said: "My soul has slumbered through weariness, strengthen me according to your word"? And when he obtains his request will he not cry out: "O how I love your law! It is my study all day long"? For our meditations on the Word who is the Bridegroom, on his glory, his elegance, power and majesty, become in a sense his way of speaking to us. And not only that, but when with eager minds we examine his rulings, the decrees from his own mouth; when we meditate on his law day and night, let us be assured that the Bridegroom is present, and that he speaks his message of happiness to us lest our trials should prove more than we can bear.

5. When you find yourself caught up in this kind of thinking, beware of seeing the thoughts as your own; you must rather acknowledge that he is present who said to the prophet: "It is I, announcing righteousness."

III. Our own thoughts bear a very close resemblance to the words Truth speaks within us; no one can easily differentiate between what springs from the heart and what he hears from without unless he attends carefully to what the Lord says in the Gospel: "Out of the heart come evil thoughts;" or that question: "Why do you think evil in your hearts?" And again: "When he (the devil) lies, he speaks according to his own nature." The Apostle says: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as coming from us," meaning here anything good, "but our sufficiency is from God." So when we yield our hearts to wicked thoughts, the thoughts are our own; if we think on good things, it is God's word. Our hearts produce the evil thoughts, they listen for those that are good. "Let me hear," the heart says, "what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people." God accordingly utters words of peace, of goodness, of righteousness within us; we do not think these things of ourselves, we hear them in our interior. On the other hand, murders, adulteries, robberies, blasphemies and similar evils come forth from the heart; we do not hear them, we produce them. For "the fool says in his heart: `there is no God.'" And hence, "The wicked has provoked God, for he has said in his heart: `He will not call to account.'" But

there is still another kind of thought that is perceived indeed in the heart but not uttered by it. It does not come forth from the heart as our thought does, nor is it that word which we have said is directed to the heart, namely, the word of the Word, because it is evil. It is produced within us by hostile powers, like the images that come to us from bad angels, such as we read the devil put into the heart of Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to betray the Lord.

6. For who can keep watch over his inward thoughts so closely and so assiduously, whether they merely occur to him or whether he is their author, as to be able to decide clearly which of the heart's illicit desires are the fruit of his own frailty, which an insinuation of the devil? I believe this is more than mortals can achieve, unless by the light of the Holy Spirit they receive that special gift which the Apostle lists with the other charisma under the name of discernment of spirits. According to Solomon, no matter how vigilantly a man may guard his heart and watch with the closest scrutiny every movement of his inward being, he will not be able to diagnose or judge exactly between the evil that is inborn and the evil implanted from without, even after prolonged study and frequent experience of these matters. For "who can understand sins?" It is of little consequence to us to know the source of the evil within us, provided we know it is there; no matter what its source we must watch and pray that we may not consent to it. The Prophet prays against both these evils: "Cleanse me from my secret sins, O Lord, and spare your servant from those others." As for me, I cannot hand on to you what I have not received. And I certainly have not received the power to distinguish with certitude between what springs from the heart and what is sown there by the enemy. Both are evil, both have an evil source; both are in the heart, though both do not originate there. I am fully certain that I bear them within, but by no means certain which to attribute to the heart, which to the enemy. But this problem, as I have said, entails no danger.

7. But where the error is dangerous, even fatal, there we are provided with a rule that is certain: not to attribute to ourselves what comes from God within us, thinking that the visit of the Word is no more than a thought of our own. The distance of good from evil is the distance between these two things: for just as evil cannot proceed from the Word, neither can good proceed from the heart unless it has been previously inspired by the Word, because "a sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit." But I think enough has been said to clarify which movements of the heart are from God and which from ourselves. And this, I feel, had to be done in order that the enemies of grace may

know that without grace man's heart is incapable of thinking good thoughts, that its capacity to do so comes from God: the good thought is God's inspiration, not the heart's offspring. You therefore, if you hear his voice, will no longer be ignorant of whence it comes or whither it goes because you will know it proceeds from God and goes to the heart. But make sure that the word which goes forth from the mouth of God does not return to him empty, see that it prospers and accomplishes all those things for which he sent it, so that you too will be able to say: "The grace of God in me has not been fruitless." Happy the man who has the Word for an inseparable companion who is always accessible, whose delightful conversation is an unceasing pleasure that frees him at all times from the flesh's bothersome vices, and enables him to use his time profitably in a wicked age. He shall be neither wearied nor troubled, since, according to Scripture, no matter what happens to the righteous man, it will not make him sad.

IV. 8. It seems to me that he appears in the guise of a mighty Father of a family or sovereign ruler to those whose hearts are high as they approach him, who, filled with magnanimous courage because of greater liberty of spirit and purity of conscience, love to dare what is above the common measure. These are restless men, eager to penetrate the deeper mysteries, to grasp sublimer truths, to strive for what is more perfect, not so much in the physical as in the spiritual order. Because of the grandeur of their faith these are considered worthy of experiencing all fullness; in all the treasure-houses of wisdom there is nothing from which the Lord, the God who knows all things, would think of turning these men away; avid for truth as they are, and their motives free of vanity. Moses was such a man, and he dared to say to God: "If I have found favor in your sight show me yourself." Such was Philip, who begged that the Father be shown to him and his fellow disciples." Thomas, too, was such a man, for he refused to believe unless he touched with his hand the spear-wound in Christ's side. This meant indeed a lack of faith, but it was a superb consequence of his greatness of soul. Again there was David, who said to God: "My heart has said to you: 'I have been searching for you;' Lord, I do seek your face." Men of this kind undertake great deeds because they are themselves great; and what they undertake they achieve, in accord with the promise which runs: "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours." Great faith deserves great rewards; and if you step out with trust where the good things of the Lord are to be found, you will possess them.

9. God spoke to Moses face to face; not by riddles and images was he privileged

to see the Lord, but openly; whereas the Lord points out that he appears to other prophets only in vision, and speaks to them in dreams. Philip too received his heart's desire when shown the Father in the Son, in that immediate reply of Christ: "Philip, he who has seen me, has seen the Father," and, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Thomas, according to his heart's desire and the protestation he had made, was permitted to touch him. And what of David? Does he not show that he has not been entirely deprived of his wish when he says that he will not give sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids until he finds a place for the Lord? To great men like these the Bridegroom will come in his greatness; he will perform mighty deeds with them, sending out his light and his truth leading them on and directing them to his holy mountain and the tent where he dwells. Any one of these men can say: "He who is mighty has done great things for me." His eyes will see the king in his beauty going before him into the beautiful places of the desert, to the flowering roses and the lilies of the valley, to gardens where delights abound and streams run from the fountains, where storerooms are filled with delightful things and the odors of perfume, till last of all he makes his way to the privacy of the bedchamber.

10. There you have the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden where the Bridegroom dwells, and there the pastures of life, prepared for the nourishment of men seeking holiness. "Blessed is the man who has fulfilled his desire from them." But let him be given at least this warning: not to wish to possess for himself alone goods that can suffice for the many. And perhaps for this reason after all these things the Bridegroom is described as appearing in a shepherd's guise, to provide a guideline to the man who has received the task of feeding a flock that contains so many of the ordinary people who are unable to understand those truths by their own efforts, just as sheep will not attempt to go out to the fields unless led by a shepherd. The bride thoughtfully takes note of this, and asks to be shown where he eats, where he rests in the midday heat, being ready, as may be gathered from her remark, both to be fed and to give food, as his helper and under his direction. She does not think it safe for the flock to wander far from their chief Shepherd because of wolves on the prowl, especially those who come to us in the clothing of sheep; and hence her endeavor to eat in the same pastures with him and rest in the same shady places. And she gives the reason: "Lest I begin to wander after the flocks of your companions." These are they who want to appear to be friends of the Bridegroom, but are not; and though their concern is to feed their own flocks rather than his, they cunningly spread the rumor: "Look, here is the Christ, look, he is there," and so seduce many people

whom they lead away from the flocks of Christ and join to their own. So far I have been dealing with the obvious meaning of the words. But for the spiritual meaning that lies hidden beneath, you must await a new sermon. This will depend on whatever our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's Bridegroom, will be pleased to impart to me in his mercy and through your prayers. He is God, blessed for ever. Amen.

### **SERMON 33 ENDS TO BE PURSUED --THE MYSTICAL NOONTIDE; TEMPTATIONS TO BE AVOIDED**

"Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it to lie down at noon." But another voice, that of Job, says: "Tell me why you judge me like this?" This man does not complain of the judgment, he merely queries its cause, seeking to gain knowledge from his afflictions rather than be destroyed by them. Still another man made a similar request: "Make your ways known to me, O Lord, teach me your paths." What he means by paths he reveals in another text: "He leads me in the path of righteousness." Therefore the man who longs for God does not cease to seek these three things, righteousness, judgment, and the place where the Bridegroom dwells in glory: the path in which he walks, the wariness with which he walks, and the home to which he walks. About this home the Prophet says: "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord;" and again: "O Lord, I love the beauty of your house, and the place where your glory dwells." Of the remaining two he says: "Righteousness and judgment are the preparation of your throne." The man who is in earnest rightly seeks these three things, since they are the throne of God and the preparation of his throne. By a special privilege of the bride, all these gifts beautifully and equally concur in the crowning of her virtues: she receives loveliness from the habit of righteousness, prudence from her knowledge of judgments, and chastity from her desire for the presence or glory of her Bridegroom. Such are the gifts that are fitting for a bride of the Lord: beauty, knowledge and chastity. Therefore the petition which I have placed last concerns the Bridegroom's dwelling-place. She asks him whom her soul loves to reveal to her where he pastures his flock, where he makes it lie down at noon.

2. But take note in the first place how exquisitely she distinguishes spiritual love

from carnal desire, when, in her wish to draw her Beloved's attention by her affection rather than by his name, she does not say simply, "whom I love," but "O you whom my soul loves," thereby indicating that her love is spiritual.

II. Consider carefully then, what it is that gives her so much pleasure in the place of pasture. Nor must you overlook the reference to the hour of noon, nor above all that she looks for a place where he who feeds the flock also lies down, a sign of great security. It would seem that the expression "lie down" is used to indicate that in this place there is no need to stand and keep watch for the safety of the flock, since the flock freely wanders in the meadows while the shepherd lies down and rests in the shade. Happy the place in which the sheep move to and fro at will, and no one to frighten them! Who will grant that you and I together may be fed on the mountains, along with the ninety-nine sheep who, we read, were left there when their shepherd went down for the one who had strayed? It was because he had left them in a safe place that he was able to undertake a long journey without hesitation, and hence he could afford to lie down securely. What can the bride do but yearn for that place of rest, of security, of exultation, of wonder, of overwhelming joy. But alas! unhappy me, far from it as I am, and saluting it from afar, the very memory of it causes me to weep with the affection expressed by those exiles: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion." Let me cry out both with the bride and with the Prophet: "Praise your God, O Zion! for he strengthened the bars of your gates; he blesses your sons within you." Who would not be filled with vehement longing to be fed in that place, on account of its peace, on account of its richness, on account of its super-abundance? There one experiences neither fear nor distaste, nor any want. Paradise is a safe dwelling-place, the Word is sweet nourishment, eternity is wealth beyond calculation.

3. I too have the Word, but the Word made flesh; and the Truth is set before me, but in the sacrament. An angel is nourished with the richness of the wheat, is satiated with the pure grain; but in this life I have to be content with the husk, as it were, of the sacrament, with the bran of the flesh, with the chaff of the letter, with the veil of the faith. And these are the kind of things whose taste brings death unless they are seasoned in some degree with the first fruits of the Spirit. I shall surely find death in the pot if it be not sweetened with the meal of the Prophet. For without the Spirit the sacrament is received as a judgment, the flesh is of no avail, the letter kills, and faith is dead. It is the Spirit who must give these things life if I am to find life in them. But no matter how great the effusion of the Spirit

that enriches these, the husk of the sacrament is not received with the same pleasure as the fat of the wheat, nor is faith the equivalent of vision, nor memory of presence, nor time of eternity, nor a face of its reflection, nor the image of God of a slave's condition. As far as all these are concerned, faith is the source of my riches, my intellect is a pauper. Can there indeed be equal pleasure in understanding and in faith, when the latter is the source of merit, the former the reward? You see then that the foods are as different as the places where they are eaten are distant from each other; and as the heavens are raised far above the earth, so those who dwell there enjoy an abundance of greater gifts.

4. Let us make haste then my sons, let us make haste to a place that is safer, to a pasture that is sweeter, to a land that is richer and more fertile. Let us make haste to a place where we may dwell without fear, where we may abound and never want, where we may feast and never weary. For while passing judgment tranquilly on all things, O Lord of hosts, you feed in security and with fairness all who dwell in that place, you who are at the same time the Lord of armies and shepherd of sheep.

III. You feed your flock therefore, and at the same time make them rest, but not here below. For you were standing that time you looked down from heaven at one of your little sheep, Stephen, when he was surrounded by wolves here on earth. And so I beseech you, "show me where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon," that is, the whole day long: for that noon is a day that knows no evening. Consequently, "a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere," because its sun never sets. But perhaps it had a sunrise, when that sanctified day first dawned upon us through the tender mercy of our God, in which the Rising Sun visited us from heaven. Truly then "we received your mercy, O God, in the midst of your temple," when, as you rose out of the shadow of death, the morning light shone over us, and in the dawn we saw the glory of God. How many prophets and kings desired to see this, and did not see it! Why should this have been unless because it was night, and that long-awaited dawn on which mercy had been promised had not yet come? Hence that prayer of the Psalmist: "Let me hear in the morning of your mercy, for in you I put my trust."

5. The dawning of this day began when the Sun of righteousness was announced to the earth by the Archangel Gabriel; when the Virgin conceived God in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, and still remaining a virgin gave birth to him; and it continued as long as he was seen on earth and lived among men.

For during all that time only a feeble light, just like the dusk of dawn, was visible, so that almost the whole world failed to realize that day-time for mankind had come. For "if they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory." Even the small group of disciples had been told: "up to now you have but little light," because it was still only the dawn, and the beginning, or rather a token light of the coming day, for the Sun concealed his rays rather than shed them over the earth. Paul too said that "the night is far gone, the day is at hand," signifying that the light was as yet so dim that he preferred to say the day was approaching than that it had come. But when did he say this? He said it when the Sun, after its return from beneath the earth, had ascended to the heights of heaven. With what greater reason might he have said it when "the likeness of sinful flesh" still covered that dawn like a dense cloud, since his body resembled ours in its liability to all manner of suffering, to which neither the bitterness of death nor the shame of the cross was wanting? With what greater reason, I insist, might he have said it when the light was so minimal, so meager, that it seemed a reflection of the dawning rather than of the Sun itself.

6. The dawn, then, and a quite clouded one at that, was the whole life of Christ upon earth, which remained obscure until he died and rose again, to put the dawn to flight by the clearer light of his glorious presence. With the coming of sunrise, night was swallowed up in victory. And so we are told that "very early on the Sunday morning, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb." Surely it was morning when the sun had risen? But the resurrection endowed it with a new beauty, with a more serene light than usual, because "even though we once knew him according to the flesh, we know him thus no longer." The Prophet wrote: "He is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed, he is girded with strength," because he shook off the flesh's frailties like cloudlets and put on the robe of glory. Since then the Sun is risen indeed, and has gradually poured down its rays over the earth; its light has begun to appear increasingly clearer, its warmth to be more perceptible.

IV. However, even though it increases in warmth and strength, though it multiplies and extends its rays over the whole course of our mortal lives - for it will be with us even to the end of the world - it will not attain to its noontide splendor, nor be seen here below in that fullness which it will exhibit hereafter, at least to those who are destined for the privilege of this vision. O true noontide, fullness of warmth and light, trysting-place of the sun; noontide that blots out shadows, that dries up marshes, that banishes evil odors! O perpetual solstice,



day that will never decline to evening! O noontide light, with your springtime freshness, your summer-like gracefulness, your autumnal fruitfulness and - let me not seem to omit it - your winter of quiescence and leisure! Although, if you prefer it, winter alone of these is over and gone. Show me this place, she said, where there is so much brightness and peace and fullness, so that, just as Jacob while still in this life saw the Lord face to face and his soul was saved; or as Moses saw him, not by means of images and obscure sayings or through dreams like some of the other Prophets, but in a manner unrivaled and beyond the experience of all others, known only to himself and God ; or as Isaiah, after the eyes of his heart had been opened, saw him seated on a high and exalted throne; or just as Paul, rapt into Paradise, heard words that he could not explain and saw his Lord Jesus Christ, so may I too merit the ecstatic grace of contemplating you in your light and beauty, as you generously feed your flock and make them rest securely.

7. Here on earth too, you feed your sheep but not to their full satisfaction; nor is it possible for you to rest, you must stand and keep watch because of the terrors of the night. Alas! there is neither clear light, nor a full repast, nor a safe place to stay; and therefore. "Tell me where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon." You call me blessed when I hunger and thirst for righteousness. But what is this in comparison with the happiness of those who are filled with the good things of your house, who feast and rejoice in the sight of their Lord, who are jubilant with joy? But if I do suffer for the sake of righteousness you nevertheless declare me blessed. To eat is pleasurable, but one does not eat in security if fear be present. To suffer and feast simultaneously is surely a bitter pleasure? All things here below fall short of perfection, many are beyond the reach of my desires, and nothing is safe. When will you fill me with the joy of your presence? Lord, I do seek your face. Your face is the noontide. "Tell me where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon." I know well enough where you pasture it without lying down; tell me where you pasture it and make it lie down. I am not unaware of your accustomed pasturage at other times; but I do wish to know where that pasturage is at noon. For during my time in this life, in this my place of pilgrimage, I am accustomed to feed and be fed under your protection, in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms, in the meadows of the Gospels; I have found rest too in the company of the apostles; and often I have done my utmost to beg food for myself and those belonging to me from the doings of the saints, from their words and writings. More often, however, because this was closer to hand, I have eaten the bread of pain and drunk the wine of

sorrow, "my tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me continually: `Where is your God? "' My one hope is your table - "for you have prepared a table before me against them that afflict me," from which I receive by favor of your mercy all that I need for refreshment when I feel sad and inwardly disturbed. This is the pasture that I have known and frequented in following you as my shepherd; but tell me also about those secret places that I do not know.

V. 8. There are too, those other shepherds who say they are companions of yours but are not, shepherds whose flocks feed on lands filled with a deadly food; there they are fed neither with you nor by you, and I have not entered their fields nor even approached them. These are the men who say: "Look, here is the Christ," or, "Look, he is there," as they make promises of pastures more rich in wisdom and knowledge; people believe them and multitudes flock to them, to be made twice as fit for hell as they themselves are. Why this, if not because they have neither noontide nor light clear enough to see the truth in its purity? They easily accept what is false because of its likeness to the truth, since in the dusk it is far from easy to distinguish it from the truth, especially as "stolen waters are sweet and bread tastes better when eaten in secret." Hence my request that you tell me "where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon," that is, in the clear light, lest I be seduced and begin to wander after the flocks of your companions, because they are wanderers, devoid of the certain truth that gives stability. Though always learning, they never attain to knowledge of the truth. Such are the comments of the bride on the varied and vain doctrines of the philosophers and heretics.

9. I feel, however, that not alone because of these, but because of the deceits of invisible powers, spirits whose work is seduction, who lie in ambush, "fitting their arrows to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart," because of these, I say emphatically, I feel that we also must yearn for that noontide, so that in its clear light we may detect the tricks of the devil, and be able to distinguish with ease between our angel and that angel of Satan who "disguises himself as an angel of light." For we cannot defend ourselves from the attack of the noontide devil except with the aid of noontide light. I believe that he is styled the noontide devil because some of those wicked spirits, who, because of their obstinate and darkened wills are like the night, even perpetual night, yet, for the purpose of deceiving men, can become bright as day, even as noon. In this they follow their prince, who, not content with being equal to God, opposes and exalts himself above everything that is called or worshiped as a god. Hence when this kind of

noontide devil sets out to tempt a man, there is no chance whatever of parrying him; he will tempt and overthrow his victim by suggesting what appears to be good, by persuading him, unsuspecting and unprepared as he is, to commit evil under the guise of good, unless the Sun from heaven shines into his heart with noontide brightness. The tempter really appears like noon, clothed in a certain splendor, when he comes with the suggestion of an apparently greater good.

10. How often, for example, does he not persuade a monk to anticipate the hour of rising, and mock at him as he sleeps in choir while his brothers pray! How often does he not suggest that fasts be prolonged, until a man is so weak that he is useless for the service of God! How often, in envy of a man's fervor in community life, does he not persuade him to live as a hermit in order to achieve greater perfection, until the unhappy man finally discovers how true that saying is which he had read to no purpose: "Woe to him who is alone, for when he falls he has none to lift him up!" How often has he not inspired a man to work harder than necessary at manual labor, until exhaustion makes him unfit for the other regular observances! How many has he not won over to indiscreet indulgence in physical exercises which the Apostle considers of little value, and sapped their spiritual stamina! And lastly, you yourselves will know how some -- to their shame I say it -- were at first so filled with ardor in all they undertook that they could not be restrained, but who in the end became so indolent as to merit the reproach of the Apostle: "Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?" What a degrading alliance they have made with those bodies on which they had previously waged a cruel warfare! For shame! those who once stubbornly refused what was necessary now insistently demand what is superfluous! And if they remain so invincibly obstinate, troubling with their indiscreet fasts and erratic behavior those with whom they are bound to dwell harmoniously in the home, I fail to see how they think they can maintain a loving union with them. They seem to me to have made this possibility more remote. Wise in their own eyes, and determined to accept neither advice nor command, let them reflect on what answer they shall give, not to me but to him who says: "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness like the crime of idolatry." Just before this he had said that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen better than to offer the fat of rams," the offering of self-willed abstinence. Hence the Lord says through the Prophet: "Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" to show that he will not accept fasting from the proud and the unclean.

11. My fear at the moment is, that while condemning these erring monks I may

seem to encourage the gluttonous, that what I speak as a remedy for the former may be interpreted by the latter to their peril.

VI. Therefore let both sides know that there are four kinds of temptation, described by the Prophet as follows: "His truth will surround you with a shield: you will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor invasion, nor the noonday devil." You others should pay attention too, because I trust that this will be of profit to everyone. All of us who have been converted to the Lord have felt and still feel the truth of what Scripture says: "My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, stand in fear, and prepare your soul for temptation." Our common experience tells us that it is fear which disturbs us at the beginning of our conversion, fear of that dismaying picture we form for ourselves of the strict life and unwonted austerities we are about to embrace. This is called a nocturnal fear, either because in scripture adversity is usually represented by darkness, or because the reward for which we are prepared to suffer adversity is not yet revealed to us. For if we could see the dawn of that day in whose light we should perceive the rewards as well as the trials, our desire of the rewards would entirely obliterate fear, since in the clear light it would be apparent that "the sufferings we now endure bear no comparison with the splendor, as yet unrevealed, which is in store for us." But since this is now hidden from our eyes, and darkness reigns about us, we are subjected to "the terror of the night," and face with dread the endurance of present evils in place of the blessings we do not see. Beginners on the way to God, therefore, must in particular watch and pray against this first temptation, or they will be suddenly overcome by pusillanimity of spirit as by a storm, and unfortunately recoil from the good work they have begun.

12. But when this temptation has been conquered, let us take up arms against the praises of men, who find matter for their compliments in the praiseworthy life we lead. Otherwise we shall be exposed to wounds from "the arrow that flies by day" which is vainglory. For fame is said to fly, and that by day, because it springs from works done in the light. But if this temptation is blown away like the empty air, we shall be confronted with a stronger one, with an offer of the riches and honors of the world, for the man who despises praise may hanker for position. Our Lord himself experienced this order of temptation: after the suggestion that he pitch himself from the temple for the sake of mere vanity, all kingdoms of the world were shown to him and offered to him. And you, following the Lord's example, must refuse what is offered. If not, you will become victims of

"the pestilence that stalks about in the darkness," which is hypocrisy. For this has its source in ambition, its dwelling in darkness: for it conceals what it really is and pretends to be what it is not. Active at all times, it retains the appearance of piety as a mask to hide behind, and barter its virtue to purchase honors.

13. The last temptation is that of the noontide devil, whose task is to lay ambushes for the perfect, those persons of tried virtue who have survived all other temptations: pleasures, applause, honors. What further weapons has the tempter with which to fight openly against men of this kind? But what he does not dare openly he will attempt in disguise; and when he is aware that a man will abominate what he sees to be patently evil, he tries to seduce him by means of a counterfeit good. Those who can say with the Apostle: "We are not ignorant of his designs," will be all the more careful to avoid that trap the more they advance. This is why Mary was perturbed by the angel's greeting: unless I am mistaken she suspected some deceit; nor would Joshua receive the angel as a friend until he was sure he was a friend. For, like a man with experience of the plotting of the noontide devil, he enquires whether he is for him or for his enemies. Wearied at the oars, with a hostile wind lashing their ship, the apostles too cried out with fear when they saw the Lord walking over the sea, and took him for a ghost. Was not this cry of fear a sign that they clearly thought him to be the noontide devil? And you recall how Scripture says: "About the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea." In the fourth or final stage, then, let us beware of this temptation. The greater the perfection a man may seem to have attained, the more he must be convinced of the need to watch vigilantly for the noontide devil. He who was the true noontide made himself known to the disciples with the words: "It is I, have no fear," and their mistrust of this strange phenomenon was dispelled. And whenever this painted falsehood tries to take us unawares, may the true Noontide, shining from the heavens, send forth his light and his truth even to us; let him divide the light from the darkness, lest we be numbered by the Prophet among those "who put darkness for light and light for darkness."

VII. 14. If you are not worn out by the length of this sermon, I shall try to apply these four temptations in due order to the Church, and Body of Christ. I shall try to be as brief as possible. Consider the Church of the early centuries: was she not most bitterly afflicted by "the terror of the night"? For it was surely night when anyone who killed the saints thought he was doing a service to God. When this temptation had been overcome and the tempest stilled, she became illustrious, and in accord with the promise made to her, soon occupied a position of

preeminence in the world. Disappointed by this frustration, the enemy craftily changed his tactics from "the terror of the night" to "the arrow that flies by day," by which he would now wound the Church's members. Vain and ambitious men came into power, intent on making a name for themselves; they abandoned the Church, their mother, and for long afflicted her with diverse and perverse doctrines. This scourge was in turn repelled by the wisdom of the saints, as the first had been by the endurance of the martyrs.

15. The times in which we live are, by the mercy of God, free from these two evils, but are obviously contaminated by "the pestilence that stalks in darkness." Woe to this generation because of the "yeast of the Pharisees - that is, their hypocrisy," if that can be called hypocrisy which is so prevalent that it cannot be hidden, and so impudent that it does not want to be! Today a foul corruption permeates the whole body of the Church, all the more incurable the more widespread it becomes, all the more dangerous the more it penetrates inwardly. For if a heretic were to rebel in public, he would be cast out to wither; if an enemy were to attack her violently, she could perhaps take refuge from him. But as things stand, whom will she cast out, or from whom will she hide herself? Everyone is a friend, everyone an enemy; everyone is indispensable, everyone an adversary; everyone is a member of the household, but not one is peace-loving; all are neighbors to each other, but all insist on their own way. Called to be ministers of Christ, they are servants of Antichrist. Promoted to honors over the possessions of the Lord, they pay the Lord no honor. Hence that bogus splendor that you see every day, that theatrical apparel, that regal pomp. Hence the gold embossments on their bridles, on their saddles, on their spurs: spurs that carry more costly adornment than their altars. Hence the banquet-laden tables with their glittering glassware; the carousing and drunkenness; the music of harp and lyre and flute; the vats overflowing with wine, storehouses crammed to the doors, and a surplus to be stowed elsewhere. Hence the painted casks, the packed money-bags. Such is the goal they aim at when they seek a prelacy in the Church, to be deans or archdeacons, bishops or archbishops. Nor do these come to them by way of merit, but through this agency that works in the darkness.

16. Long ago the following prophecy was made, and now we see its fulfillment: "See how in peace my bitterness is most bitter." It was bitter at first in the slaying of the martyrs, more bitter in later times in the struggle with the heretics, but now most bitter of all in the corrupt morals of the members of the household. She

cannot drive them away nor fly from them, so strong have they grown, so numerous beyond counting. This sickness of the Church is deeply rooted and incurable, which is why that during peace her bitterness is most bitter. But what is the nature of this peace? It is a peace that is not peace. She has peace from the pagans, peace from the heretics, but not from her own sons. And so today we hear her grief-laden words: "Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me." They have rebelled, they have dishonored me, by their shameful lives, their shameful gains, their shameful trafficking, by all the intrigue that is perpetuated in the darkness. Nothing remains but for the noontide devil to appear in our midst, to seduce those who still abide in Christ, who remain faithful to his truth. For he has already swallowed up the rivers of the wise and the streams of the powerful; he is even confident that Jordan will flow into his mouth, that he will devour the humble and the simple who are still in the Church. For he is Antichrist, who pretends that he is not only the day but the very noon, who "exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship," whom "the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of his mouth," whom he will destroy with the light of his coming, because he is the true and eternal Noontide, the Bridegroom and defender of the Church; he is God, blessed for ever. Amen.

### **SERMON 34 TRUE HUMILITY**

"If you do not know, O fairest among women, go forth and follow the flocks of your companions and pasture your kids beside the shepherds' tents." Of old, taking advantage of the familiar friendship that had developed between him and God, that holy man Moses so longed for the great favor of seeing him that he said to God: "If I have found favor in your sight, show yourself to me." Instead of that he received a vision of an inferior kind, but one which nevertheless would help him to attain eventually to the one for which he longed. Following the guileless urging of their hearts, the sons of Zebedee also dared to ask for a great favor, but they too were directed back to the way by which they must ascend to higher things. In similar fashion now, when the bride seems to demand a very special concession, she is rebuffed with an answer that, though harsh, is meant to be helpful and trustworthy. Anyone who strives forward toward the spiritual heights must have a lowly opinion of himself; because when he is raised above himself he may lose his grip on himself, unless through true humility, he has a firm hold on himself. It is only when humility warrants it that great graces can be

obtained, hence the one to be enriched by them is first humbled by correction that by his humility he may merit them. And so when you perceive that you are being humiliated, look on it as the sign of a sure guarantee that grace is on the way. Just as the heart is puffed up with pride before its destruction, so it is humiliated before being honored. You read in Scripture of these two modes of acting, how the Lord resists the proud and gives his grace to the humble. Did he not decide to reward his servant Job with generous blessings after the outstanding victory in which his great patience was put to the severest test? He was prepared for blessings by the many searching trials that humbled him.

II. 2. But it matters little if we willingly accept the humiliation which comes from God himself, if we do not maintain a similar attitude when he humiliates us by means of another. And I want you to take note of a wonderful instance of this in St David, that time when he was cursed by a servant and paid no heed to the repeated insults, so sensitive was he to the influence of grace. He merely said: "What has this to do with me and you, O sons of Zeruah?" Truly a man after God's own heart, who decided to be angry with the one who would avenge him rather than with the one who reviled him. Hence he could say with an easy conscience: "If I have repaid with evils those who offended me, let me rightly fall helpless before my enemies." He would not allow them to silence this evil-spoken scoundrel; to him the curses were gain. He even added: "The Lord has sent him to curse David." A man altogether after God's own heart, since the judgment he passed was from the heart of God. While the wicked tongue raged against him, his mind was intent on discovering the hidden purpose of God. The voice of the reviler sounded in his ears, but in his heart he disposed himself for blessings. Was God in the mouth of the blasphemer? God forbid! But he made use of it to humiliate David. And this was not hidden from the Prophet, to whom God had manifested the unpredictable secrets of his wisdom. Hence he says: "It was good for me that you humiliated me, that I might learn your statutes."

3. Do you see that humility makes us righteous? I say humility and not humiliation. How many are humiliated who are not humble! There are some who meet humiliation with rancor, some with patience, some again with cheerfulness. The first kind are culpable, the second are innocent, the last just. Innocence is indeed a part of justice, but only the humble possess it perfectly. He who can say: "It was good for me that you humiliated me," is truly humble. The man who endures it unwillingly cannot say this; still less the man who murmurs. To neither of these do I promise grace on the grounds of being humiliated, although the two



are vastly different from each other, since the one possesses his own soul in his patience, while the other perishes in his murmuring. For even if only one of them does merit anger, neither of them merits grace, because it is not to the humiliated but to the humble that God gives grace. But he is humble who turns humiliation into humility, and he is the one who says to God: "It was good for me that you humiliated me." What is merely endured with patience is good for nobody, it is an obvious embarrassment. On the other hand we know that "God loves a cheerful giver." Hence even when we fast we are told to anoint our head with oil and wash our face, that our good work might be seasoned with spiritual joy and our holocaust made fat. For it is the possession of a joyful and genuine humility that alone enables us to receive grace. But the humility that is due to necessity or constraint, that we find in the patient man who keeps his self-possession, cannot win God's favor because of the accompanying sadness, although it will preserve his life because of patience. Since he does not accept humiliation spontaneously or willingly, one cannot apply to such a person the scriptural commendation that the humble man may glory in his exaltation.

III. 4. If you wish for an example of a humble man glorying with all due propriety, and truly worthy of glory, take Paul when he says that gladly will he glory in his weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell within him. He does not say that he will bear his weaknesses patiently, but he will even glory in them, and that willingly, thus proving that to him it is good that he is humiliated, and that it is not sufficient that one keep his self-possession by patience when he is humbled; to receive grace one must embrace humiliation willingly. You may take as a general rule that everyone who humbles himself will be exalted. It is significant that not every kind of humility is to be exalted, but that which the will embraces; it must be free of compulsion or sadness. Nor on the contrary must everyone who is exalted be humiliated, but only he who exalts himself, who pursues a course of vain display. Therefore it is not the one who is humiliated who will be exalted, but he who voluntarily humiliates himself; it is merited by this attitude of will. Even suppose that the occasion of humiliation is supplied by another, by means of insults, damages or sufferings, the victim who determines to accept all these for God's sake with a quiet, joyful conscience, cannot properly be said to be humiliated by anyone but himself.

5. But where does this take me? I feel that your endurance of this protracted discussion on humility and patience is an exercise in patience; but let us return to the place from which we digressed. All that I have said developed from the

answer in which the Bridegroom decided that the bride's aspiration toward lofty experiences should be restrained, not in order to confound her, but to provide an occasion for more solid, more deep humility, by which her capacity and worthiness for the sublimer experiences she desired would be increased. However, we are but at the beginning of this present verse, so with your permission, I shall postpone discussion of it to another sermon, lest the Bridegroom's words be recounted or heard with weariness. May our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever, avert this from his servants. Amen.

### **SERMON 35 THE BRIDEGROOM REPROVES THE BRIDE -- TWO KINDS OF IGNORANCE**

"If you do not know yourself, go forth." What a hard and bitter reproof: "Go forth." This is the kind of language that slaves hear from masters smarting with anger, or slave-girls from mistresses they have gravely offended: "Get out of here, get away from me, clear out of my sight, away from this house." And this kind of harsh and bitter expression, extremely reproachful, is now used by the Bridegroom against his beloved, but with this condition: if she does not know herself. Nothing he could say was more warranted to frighten her than the threat that she should go forth. And you can see this if you think well on the place she is to go forth from and where she is told to go. From where and to where, if not from the spirit to the flesh, from things that are the soul's delight to desire of earthy pleasures, from the inward repose of the mind to the world's clattering bustle where worry allows no peace; in all of which there is nothing but toil and sorrow and spiritual suffering. The soul has been taught by the Lord and received the power to enter into itself, to long for the presence of God in its inmost depths, to seek his face continually -- for God is a spirit, and those who seek him ought to walk by the promptings of the Spirit rather than of the flesh, lest they live according to the flesh. Would that soul regard a temporary experience of hell as more horrible, more punitive, than having once tasted the sweetness of this spiritual desire, to have to go out again to the allurements or rather the irksome demands of the flesh, and be involved as before in the insatiable prurience of the body's senses? Ecclesiastes says: "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." Listen to a man who has experienced the things I speak of: "The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him." To attempt to turn this holy man away from that good, would cause him to feel as if

driven out of Paradise, from the very gateway to glory. Listen to another man with a similar experience: "My heart says to you: 'My face has sought you;' your face, O Lord, I shall seek." Whence he said: "It is good for me to adhere to God;" and he addresses his soul with the words: "Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you." Therefore I say to you: There is nothing so feared by a man who has once received this favor, than, abandoned by grace, to have to go out again to the fleshly consolations, which are really desolations, and to endure once more the tumult of physical desire.

2. "Go forth and pasture your kids:" it is a terrible, an awe-inspiring threat. As much as to say: know yourself unworthy of that familiar and sweet contemplation of things heavenly, things of the spirit, divine things. Therefore go forth from that heart of yours which has been my sanctuary, where it was your custom to drink sweet draughts from the secret, holy teachings of truth and wisdom; be like a woman of the world, become entangled in pandering to the nourishment and delights of your flesh. Since through them sin enters the soul like death through the windows, he calls the restless, wanton senses of the body kids, which signifies sin -- at the judgment they are to be placed on the left. The words that follow in the text, "beside the shepherds' tents," agree suitably with this interpretation. For unlike lambs, kids are fed not above but beside the shepherds' tents. Even though during the days of their service here below they dwell in tents set upon the earth and made of earth, namely, their own bodies, shepherds who are worthy of the name are accustomed to feed the flocks of the Lord with food from the heavenly pastures, not from the earth; it is the Lord's will that they preach, not their own. The kids however, the bodily senses, do not need heavenly things, but staying beside the shepherds' tents, they choose their foods from all the material goods of this world, which is the body's sphere; but desire, far from being satisfied, is but stimulated by these foods.

3. What a shameful change of occupation! Her previous occupation was to nourish her exiled pilgrim soul with holy meditations, feeding on heavenly truths, to seek after God's good-pleasure and the mysteries of his will, to penetrate the heavens by the power of her love and wander in thought through the abodes of the blessed, to pay homage to the patriarchs and apostles and throngs of prophets, to admire the triumphs of the martyrs and be lost in wonder at the superb beauty of the angel choirs. Now she has to abandon all these, and subject herself to the shameful task of serving the body, of obeying the flesh; she must satisfy stomach and palate, and beg throughout the world, this world whose

form is passing away, for she means to gratify in some degree her perpetually ravenous curiosity. My tears flow like streams for a soul in this plight: she who once fed so delicately now lies grovelling on the dunghill. One may say with the blessed Job that she fed the barren, childless woman and did no good to the widow.

II. It is worth noting that he did not simply tell her to go forth, but to go after the flocks of her companions and to feed her kids. It seems to me that here he is warning us of something very important. What is that? Alas! that one who was so excellent, at one time a member of the flock and now, in wretched decline from bad to worse, is not permitted to remain with the flocks but commanded to go behind them. You ask what I mean. You yourselves can read: "When man was being honored, he did not understand; and now he is compared to senseless beasts and becomes like them." That is how one so excellent is made one of the flock. And the brutes, if they could speak, would surely say: "See, Adam has become like one of us." He who was being honored! "How honored?" you ask. His dwelling was in Paradise, he spent his days in the midst of delights. His food the sweet-smelling apples, his bed the flowered banks, he was crowned with glory and honor, made keeper of the things his Creator had made, and knew neither trouble nor want. A gift still more sublime was the divine likeness he bore, that destined him for companionship with the angel hosts, with the multitudes of heaven's armies.

4. But he "exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass." That is why the bread of angels became like grass in the manger, set before us for the beasts that we are. For the Word was made flesh, and according to the Prophet, all flesh is grass. But the grass of the Word has not been withered nor has its bloom turned pale, because the Spirit of the Lord has rested upon him. And even though the grass may wither and the flower fade, the Word of the Lord remains forever. Therefore if the grass is the Word, and the Word remains forever, the grass too of necessity remains forever. How could it bestow eternal life if it did not itself remain forever?

5. Let us ponder together on the voice of the Son addressing the Father in the words of the Psalm. "You will not allow your Holy One to see corruption." He is obviously speaking of the body that lay lifeless in the tomb. This is that same Holy One of whom the angel spoke when he announced to the Virgin Mary: "The Holy One to be born of you will be called the Son of God." How could it be

possible for that holy grass to see corruption, sprouting as it was in the spring-like meadows, perpetually green, of an incorruptible womb? It can even hold fast the eager eyes of the angels in a joy that will never grow weary. The grass will lose its freshness only if Mary will lose her virginity. And so he who is food for man has changed himself into fodder for beasts, because man has been changed into a beast. Alas! a sad and pitiable change, that man, a native of Paradise, lord of the earth, citizen of heaven, member of the household of the Lord of hosts, a brother of the blessed spirits and co-heir of the heavenly powers, finds himself lying in a stable by a sudden transformation due to his own weakness, in need of grass because of his animal likeness, and tied to the manger because of his untamed roughness. As it is written: "Curbed by bit and bridle, the jaws of those who will not stay close to you." Acknowledge, O ox, your owner and you, ass, your Lord's crib, that God's Prophets may be found trustworthy in their foretelling of these wonderful works of God. Acknowledge, Beast, him whom in your human condition you did not acknowledge; adore in the stable him from whom you fled in Paradise; pay honor now to the crib of one whose rule you scorned; eat now as grass him for whom as bread, the Bread of angels, you lost all taste.

III. 6. You ask: "What is the cause of this debasement?" Simply that when man was in honor he lacked understanding. What did he not understand? The Psalmist does not explain, but let me explain. Placed in a position of honor, he was so intrigued by the dignity of his rank that he did not understand that he was but clay, and soon experienced in himself what a member of the captive race both wisely noted and truly expressed at a much later date: "If anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself." Woe to that first unhappy man that no one was then present who could say to him: "Dust and ashes, why are you proud?" From then on this fairest of creatures was reduced to the level of the herd; from then on the likeness of God was changed to the likeness of a beast; from then on association with the animals took the place of fellowship with the angels. You see how careful we must be to shun this ignorance that has brought evils by the thousands on the whole human race! For the Psalmist compares man to the senseless beasts, for the reason that he lacked understanding. We must avoid ignorance at any cost, or if we are found to be still without understanding even after chastisement, more serious evils than the former will multiply upon us and it will be said of us: "We tried to cure Babylon; she has gotten no better." And rightly so, if the chastisement has failed to make us understand what we have heard.

7. And see if perhaps it was not for this reason that the Bridegroom, in order to fill his beloved with a fear of this ignorance by the thunder of his threatening, did not say "Go forth with the flocks," or "go forth to the flocks," but "Go forth after the flocks of your companions." Why does he speak in this manner? Surely for the purpose of showing that the second ignorance was more to be feared, to be ashamed of, than the first, for the first brought man to a level with the beasts, the latter made him lower. Because men, unaccepted or reprobated on account of their ignorance, have to stand before the dreaded judgment seat and be committed to the unquenchable fire, but not so the beasts. Men of this type will fare worse in relation to the beasts than if they did not exist at all. "It would have been better for that man," he said, "if he had not been born." He does not mean if he had not been born at all, but if he had not been born a man; better to have been a beast or any other irrational creature, which, since it lacks the faculty of judging, will not be brought to judgment, nor through this to punishment. The rational soul then, that is ashamed of its first ignorance, should remember that though it has beasts for companions in the enjoyment of earthly goods, it will not have their company in its endurance of hell's torments; that it will ultimately be banished with shame even from the flocks of its bestial companions; that it will not travel with them but plainly after them; for when they shall have ceased to feel any evil, it will be exposed to evils of all kinds from which it will never be set free, if indeed it has added the second ignorance to the first. Accordingly man goes forth and walks alone after the flocks of his companions, since he alone is thrust into the pit of hell. Does he not seem to you to hold the last place who is bound hands and feet and thrown out into the dark? The last state of that man will obviously be worse than the former, for then he was on terms of equality with the beasts, now he is reduced to a lower condition.

IV. 8. If you pay close attention, I think you will decide that even in this life man has a lower position than the beasts. Do you not think that man endowed with reason but failing to live reasonably is more of a beast than the beasts themselves? For if the beast does not control himself by reason he has an excuse based on his very nature, for that gift was totally denied to him; but man has no excuse, because reason is a special prerogative of his nature. A man then in this condition is rightly judged to go forth from the company of other living creatures and drop to a lower level, since he is the only creature who violates the laws of his nature by a degenerate way of life. Gifted with reason, he imitates those who lack it in what he does and in what he loves. It is demonstrably clear

therefore, that man is inferior to the herds, in this life by the depravity of his nature, in the next by the severity of the punishment.

9. That is how a man becomes accursed when he is found to be ignorant of God. Or should I say ignorant of self? I must include both: the two kinds of ignorance are damnable, either is enough to incur damnation. And do you want to know why? It should be perfectly obvious about ignorance of God if you can see that there is only one eternal life: to acknowledge the Father as true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. Therefore hear the Bridegroom plainly and openly condemning the soul's ignorance of itself. For what does he say? Not "if you do not know God," but "if you do not know yourself." It is clear therefore that he who does not know will not be known, whether the ignorance refers to himself or to God. If God gives us help, it will be to our profit to speak again about this twofold ignorance. But not now: you are tired, we have not prefaced it with the customary prayers, and either I shall treat so important a matter carelessly, or you will listen with less attention to truths that should be absorbed with ardent desire. If you try to take a meal when already full and without appetite, not only is it useless but very harmful. All the more so if the food of the soul is taken with disrelish: instead of increasing knowledge it will merely trouble the mind. May Jesus Christ, the Church's Bridegroom, who is blessed forever, preserve us from this. Amen.

### **SERMON 36 THE ACQUIRING OF KNOWLEDGE**

Here I am as I promised; here I am, both in compliance with your request and to give to God the service I owe him. Three reasons therefore compel me to speak to you: fidelity to my promise, brotherly love, and the fear of the Lord. If I refuse to speak, my own mouth condemns me. But what if I do speak? Then I dread a similar judgment, that my mouth will condemn me as one who speaks but fails to accomplish. Help me therefore with your prayers that I may always speak as I ought, and act in accord with my words. You are aware that I propose to speak today of ignorance, or rather of different kinds of ignorance. You remember I mentioned two kinds, one with regard to ourselves, the other with regard to God. And I warned that we must beware of these two, because both are reprehensible. It remains for me now to expound this more clearly and at greater length. But first I think we must try to discover if all ignorance is reprehensible. It seems to me that this is not true - nor does all ignorance occasion loss - since there are

various and countless things of which one may know nothing without detriment to salvation. If you are ignorant of the craftsman's art, for example that of the carpenter or mason, or any other craft practiced by men for the purposes of the present life, does this prevent your being saved? But while unacquainted with any of the liberal arts— though not denying that they may be learned and practiced for honorable and useful ends - how many people are saved by living well and doing good, those whom the Apostle mentions in the Epistle to the Hebrews, men who were dear to God not because of knowledge of literature but because of a good conscience and a sincere faith? They all pleased God in their lives by the merits of their lives, not by their knowledge. Peter and Andrew and the sons of Zebedee, and all the other disciples, were not chosen from a school of rhetoric or philosophy; and yet through them the Savior made his salvation effective throughout the world. Unlike a certain holy man who made this claim for himself, it was not because their wisdom surpassed that of all other living men, but because of their faith and meekness, that he made them his friends, sanctified them, and appointed them teachers. And when they revealed to the world the paths of life, it was not with sublime language or the polished words of human wisdom. Rather it pleased God, since the world in its wisdom did not recognize him, that through the foolishness of their preaching believers should be saved.

II. 2. Perhaps you think that I have sullied too much the good name of knowledge, that I have cast aspersions on the learned and proscribed the study of letters. God forbid! I am not unmindful of the benefits its scholars conferred, and still confer, on the Church, both by refuting her opponents and instructing the simple. And I have read the text: "As you have rejected knowledge, so do I reject you from my priesthood;" read that the learned will shine as brightly as the vault of heaven, and those who have instructed many in virtue as bright as stars for all eternity. But I recall reading too that knowledge puffs up, and "the more the knowledge, the more the sorrow." There are then different kinds of knowledge, one contributing to self-importance, the other to sadness. Which of the two do you think is more useful or necessary to salvation, the one that makes you vain or the one that makes you weep? I feel sure you would prefer the latter to the former, for vanity but pretends to health whereas pain expresses a need. Anyone who thus demands is on the way to being saved, because the one who asks receives. Furthermore, Paul tells us that he who heals the brokenhearted abhors the proud: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Paul also said, "By the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think more than



he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment." He does not forbid thinking, but inordinate thinking. And what is meant by thinking with sober judgment? It means taking the utmost care to discover what are the essential and primary truths, for the time is short. All knowledge is good in itself, provided it be founded on the truth; but since because of the brevity of time you are in a hurry to work out your salvation in fear and trembling, take care to learn, principally and primarily, the doctrines on which your salvation is more intimately dependent. Do not doctors of medicine hold that part of the work of healing depends on a right choice in the taking of food, what to take first, what next, and the amount of each kind to be eaten? For although it is clear that all the foods God made are good, if you fail to take the right amount in due order, you obviously take them to the detriment of your health. And what I say about foods I want you to apply to the various kinds of knowledge.

3. I prefer though to let you consult the Master. The doctrine I have preached is not really mine but his; though mine as well insofar as it is the word of him who is Truth. For Paul said: "If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know." He does not approve of the well-read man who observes no scale of values in the knowledge he possesses. See how the fruit and usefulness of knowledge is determined by the manner in which one knows. And what does that manner imply? It implies the order, the application, and the sense of purpose with which one approaches the object of study. The order implies that we give precedence to all that aids spiritual progress; the application, that we pursue more eagerly all that strengthens love more; and the purpose, that we pursue it not through vain-glory or inquisitiveness or any base motive, but for the welfare of oneself or one's neighbor.

III. For there are some who long to know for the sole purpose of knowing, and that is shameful curiosity; others who long to know in order to become known, and that is shameful vanity. To such as these we may apply the words of the Satirist: "Your knowledge counts for nothing unless your friends know you have it." There are others still who long for knowledge in order to sell its fruits for money or honors, and this is shameful profiteering; others again who long to know in order to be of service, and this is charity. Finally there are those who long to know in order to benefit themselves, and this is prudence.

4. Of all these categories, only the last two avoid the abuse of knowledge, because they desire to know for the purpose of doing good. People with sound

judgment act in this way. Let all others heed the warning: he who knows what he ought to do and fails to do it, commits sin; just as food eaten but not digested is injurious to one's health. Food that is badly cooked and indigestible induces physical disorders and damages the body instead of nourishing it. In the same way if a glut of knowledge stuffed in the memory, that stomach of the mind, has not been cooked on the fire of love, and transfused and digested by certain skills of the soul, its habits and actions - since, as life and conduct bear witness, the mind is rendered good through its knowledge of good— will not that knowledge be reckoned sinful, like the food that produces irregular and harmful humors? Is not sin a humor of evil? Are not bad habits humors of evil? Will not a man in this condition suffer in his conscience inflammations and torments, since he does not act as he knows he should? And will he not find within himself the threat of death and damnation as often as he calls to mind the saying of God, that the man who knows what his Lord wants, but fails to respond as he should, will receive many strokes of the lash? Perhaps the Prophet was lamenting in the guise of such a man when he said: "There is an anguish within me, anguish within!" Or perhaps the repetition of the woes hint at a different meaning that I ought to follow up. It is possible that the Prophet spoke these words in his own person when, filled with a knowledge and overflowing with a love that he longed with all his soul to communicate, he found no one who wanted to listen; the knowledge that he could not impart became a burden on his mind. This holy teacher of the Church therefore, bewails both those who scorn to learn how to live, and those who, knowing the truth, yet live evil lives. This could explain the prophet's repetition of those words.

5. Do you not see then, how truly the Apostle perceived that knowledge puffs up?

IV. I wish therefore that before everything else a man should know himself, because not only usefulness but right order demand this. Right order, since what we are is our first concern; and usefulness, because this knowledge gives humility rather than self-importance, it provides a basis on which to build. For unless there is a durable foundation of humility, the spiritual edifice has no hope of standing. And there is nothing more effective, more adapted to the acquiring of humility, than to find out the truth about oneself. There must be no dissimulation, no attempt at self-deception, but a facing up to one's real self without flinching and turning aside. When a man thus takes stock of himself in the clear light of truth, he will discover that he lives in a region where likeness to God has been

forfeited and groaning from the depths of a misery to which he can no longer remain blind, will he not cry out to the Lord as the Prophet did: "In your truth you have humbled me"? How can he escape being genuinely humbled on acquiring this true self-knowledge, on seeing the burden of sin that he carries, the oppressive weight of his mortal body, the complexities of earthly cares, the corrupting influence of sensual desires; on seeing his blindness, his worldliness, his weakness, his embroilment in repeated errors; on seeing himself exposed to a thousand dangers, trembling amid a thousand fears, confused by a thousand difficulties, defenseless before a thousand suspicions, worried by a thousand needs; one to whom vice is welcome, virtue repugnant? Can this man afford the haughty eyes, the proud lift of the head? With the thorns of his misery pricking him, will he not rather be changed for the better? Let him be changed and weep, changed to mourning and sighing, changed to acceptance of the Lord, to whom in his lowliness he will say: "Heal me because I have sinned against you." He will certainly find consolation in this turning to the Lord, because he is "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort."

6. As for me, as long as I look at myself, my eye is filled with bitterness. But if I look up and fix my eyes on the aid of the divine mercy, this happy vision of God soon tempers the bitter vision of myself, and I say to him: "I am disturbed within so I will call you to mind from the land of the Jordan. This vision of God is not a little thing. It reveals him to us as listening compassionately to our prayers, as truly kind and merciful, as one who will not indulge his resentment. His very nature is to be good, to show mercy always and to spare. By this kind of experience, and in this way, God makes himself known to us for our good. When a man first discovers that he is in difficulties, he will cry out to the Lord who will hear him and say: "I will deliver you and you shall glorify me." In this way your self-knowledge will be a step to the knowledge of God; he will become visible to you according as his image is being renewed within you. And you, gazing confidently on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, will be transformed into that same image with ever increasing brightness, by the work of the Spirit of the Lord.

7. You can see now how each of these kinds of knowledge is so necessary for your salvation, that you cannot be saved if you lack either of them. If you lack self-knowledge you will possess neither the fear of God nor humility. And whether you may presume to be saved without the fear of God and humility, is for you to judge. The murmuring that I hear among you shows me quite clearly that

this is not your idea of wisdom, or rather not your way of being foolish, so we need not linger over what is obvious. But there are other things to attend to, or should we come to an end for the sake of those who are asleep down there? I thought that with one sermon I should fulfill my promise about the two kinds of ignorance, and I would have, but it is already too long for those who are tired of it. Some, I can see, are yawning, and some are asleep. And no wonder, for last night's vigils were prolonged; that excuses them. But what shall I say to those who were asleep then, and now sleep again? I am not now going to add to their shame, it is enough to have mentioned it. But for the future they must be on the alert, or they will have to endure the sting of further reproach. With this hope in view I pass over the matter for the moment; and though reason demands that I continue the sermon, out of charity for them I shall postpone it to another time, making an end where there is no end. And they, because of the mercy shown them, must give glory along with us to the Church's Bridegroom, our Lord, who is God blessed for ever. Amen.

### **SERMON 37 KNOWLEDGE AND IGNORANCE OF GOD AND OF SELF**

I presume there is no need today to remind you to stay awake, because I feel that the remarks I made as recently as yesterday, friendly remarks, will be enough to keep those concerned on the alert. You remember that you have agreed with me that no one is saved without self-knowledge, since it is the source of that humility on which salvation depends, and of the fear of the Lord that is as much the beginning of salvation as of wisdom. No one, I repeat, is saved without that knowledge, provided he is old enough and sane enough to possess it. I say this because of children and mental defectives, to whom a different principle applies. But what if you have no knowledge of God? Is hope of salvation compatible with ignorance about God? Surely not. For you cannot love what you do not know, nor possess what you do not love. Know yourself and you will have a wholesome fear of God; know him and you will also love him. In the first, wisdom has its beginning, in the second its crown, for "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and "love is the fulfilling of the law." You must avoid both kinds of ignorance, because without fear and love salvation is not possible. Other matters are irrelevant in this context: to know them does not guarantee salvation, nor does ignorance of them mean damnation.

2. I am far from saying however, that knowledge of literature is to be despised, for it provides culture and skill, and enables a man to instruct others. But knowledge of God and of self are basic and must come first, for as I have already shown, they are essential for salvation. This was the viewpoint of the Prophet, this was the order of precedence he inculcated when he said: "Sow for yourselves righteousness, and reap the hope of life." and then: "Set alight for yourselves the light of knowledge." He puts knowledge in the last place, because, like a picture that cannot stand on the air, it requires that the solid structure of the other two precede and support it. I may safely pursue studies if my hope of eternal life has first been rendered secure. You therefore have sown righteousness for yourself if by means of true self-knowledge you have learned to fear God, to humble yourself, to shed tears, to distribute alms and participate in other works of charity; if you have disciplined your body with fastings and prayers, if you have wearied your heart with acts of penance and heaven with your petitions. This is what it means to sow righteousness. The seeds are our good works, our good desires, our tears, for the Psalmist says: 'They wept as they went forth, sowing their seeds.' But why? Shall they always weep? God forbid! "They shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves." And so rightly do they shout for joy, since they bring back sheaves of glory. But you say: "That is for the resurrection on the last day; a long time to wait! "

II. Do not permit your will to be broken, do not yield to pusillanimity; you have in the meantime the first-fruits of the Spirit, which even now you may reap with joy. "Sow for yourselves righteousness, and reap the hope of life." These words do not postpone your triumph till the last day, when the object of your desire will be possessed, not hoped for; they refer to the time now at your disposal. But when eternal life does come, what great gladness there will be, what joy beyond imagining!

3. And can the hope of this great happiness be without happiness? The Apostle speaks of rejoicing in hope. David, when he expressed the hope of entering the house of God, said that it gave him happiness now, not in the future. Eternal life was not yet his, but his hope reached out to it; so that in his heart he experienced the Scriptural truth that the just man finds joy not only in the reward but even in the expectation of it. The assurance of pardon for sins begets this joy in the heart where the seeds of righteousness are sown, if that assurance is corroborated by a holier life inspired by the efficacy of the grace received. Everyone among you

who enjoys this experience understands what the Spirit says, for his voice never contradicts his activity. This is why one understands what is said; what one hears from without he feels within. For one and the same Spirit both speaks to us and works within you, distributing gifts to each individual at will, giving to some the power to speak what is good, to others the power to do it.

4. Anyone therefore who has the happiness of being borne aloft on the wings of grace and of breathing freely in the hope of consolation after the early period of conversion with its bitterness and tears, already in this life gathers the fruit of his tears; he has had a vision of God and heard the voice that says: "Give him a share of the fruits of his hands." If he has tasted and seen that the Lord is sweet, has he not seen God: Lord Jesus, how pleasant and sweet must you be to him whom you have not merely blessed with forgiveness of sins but endowed too with the gift of holiness; and along with that, added to the treasury of his goods, the promise of eternal life. Happy the man with all this for a harvest, who now has the fruits of holiness and at the end eternal life. It was but right that he who wept when faced with the truth about himself, should rejoice on seeing the Lord, whose all-merciful eyes gave him strength to carry those precious sheaves: forgiveness, sanctification, and the hope of eternal life. It bears out the truth in the Prophet's words: "Those who sow in tears shall reap in jubilation!" We find the two kinds of knowledge within these words: that of ourselves in the sowing in tears; and that of God, in the reaping in joy.

III. 5. If we have first made sure of this two-fold knowledge, we are less likely to become conceited by any other learning we may add to it. The earthly gain or honor it may confer on us is far beneath the hope conceived and the deeply rooted joy in the soul that springs from this hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. It does not disappoint because love fills us with assurance. Through it the Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are sons of God. What advantage can we derive from any amount of our learning that is not less than the glory of being numbered among God's sons? Small indeed; nor can the earth itself with its fullness be compared to it, even if one of us gained possession of it all. But if we are ignorant of God how can we hope in one we do not know? If ignorant about ourselves, how can we be humble, thinking ourselves to be something when we are really nothing? And we know that neither the proud nor the hopeless have part or companionship in the inheritance of the saints.

6. Let us consider therefore with what extreme care we ought to banish from our minds these two kinds of ignorance. One is responsible for the beginning, the other for the consummation of every sin, just as in the case of the two kinds of knowledge where one begets the fear of God and is the beginning of wisdom and the other begets the love that is its crown. These roles of knowledge have already been explained, now let us examine the roles of ignorance. Just as the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, so pride is the beginning of all sin; and just as the love of God is the way to the perfection of wisdom, so despair leads to the committing of every sin. And as the fear of God springs up within you from knowledge of self and love of God from the knowledge of God, so on the contrary, pride comes from want of self-knowledge and despair from want of knowledge of God. Ignorance of what you are contributes to your pride, because your deluded and deluding thoughts lie to you, telling you you are better than you are. For this is pride, this is how all sin originates - that you are greater in your own eyes than you are before God, than you are in truth. Hence it has been said of him who first committed a grave sin of this kind - I mean the devil - that he did not abide in the truth, but was a liar from the beginning, since what he was in his own mind was not what he was in truth. But what would be the consequences if his departure from truth consisted in thinking himself less important than he was? His genuine ignorance would excuse him and no one would call him proud; rather than his error exposing him to scorn, we should have humility leading him to grace. For if each of us could clearly see the truth of our condition in God's sight, it would be our duty to depart neither upwards nor downwards from that level, but to conform to the truth in all things. Since God's judgment however, is now in darkness and his word is hidden from us, so that no man knows whether he deserves to be loved or hated, it is certainly the better thing, the safer thing, to follow the advice of him who is truth, and choose for ourselves the last place. Afterwards we may be promoted from there with honor, rather than cede to another, to our shame, the higher seat we had usurped.

IV. 7. You run no risk therefore, no matter how much you lower yourself, no matter how much your self-esteem falls short of what you are, that is, of what Truth thinks of you. But the evil is great and the risk frightening if you exalt yourself even a little above what you are, if in your thoughts you consider yourself of more worth than even one person whom Truth may judge your equal or your better. To make myself clearer: if you pass through a low doorway you suffer no hurt however much you bend, but if you raise your head higher than the doorway, even by a finger's breadth, you will dash it against the lintel and injure

yourself. So also a man has no need to fear any humiliation, but he should quake with fear before rashly yielding to even the least degree of self-exaltation. So then, beware of comparing yourself with your betters or your inferiors, with a particular few or with even one. For how do you know but that this one person, whom you perhaps regard as the vilest and most wretched of all, whose life you recoil from and spurn as more befouled and wicked, not merely than yours, for you trust you are a sober-living man and just and religious, but even than all other wicked men; how do you know, I say, but that in time to come, with the aid of the right hand of the Most High, he will not surpass both you and them if he has not done so already in God's sight? That is why God wished us to choose neither a middle seat nor the last but one, nor even one of the lowest rank; for he said, "Sit down in the lowest place," that you may sit alone, last of all, and not dare to compare yourself, still less to prefer yourself, to anyone. See how great the evil that springs from our want of self-knowledge; nothing less than the devil's sin and the beginning of every sin, pride. What ignorance of God leads to, we shall see on another occasion. We have been late in coming together here today and the shortness of the time does not permit it now. For the present it suffices that each one has been warned about want of self-knowledge, not only by means of my sermon but also by the goodness of the Bridegroom of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God, blessed for ever. Amen.

### **SERMON 38 IGNORANCE OF GOD LEADS TO DESPAIR; THE BEAUTY OF THE BRIDE**

To what then does ignorance of God lead? We must begin here, for this is where, as you will recall, we finished yesterday. What does it lead to? I have already told you: despair. Now I shall explain how. Imagine a man who decides to take stock of his way of life, who, unhappy in his sinful conduct, wants to reform and abandon his evil and carnal ways. If he does not know how good God is, how kind and gentle, how willing to pardon, will not his sensually-inspired reason argue with him and say: "What are you doing? Do you want to lose this life and the next? Your sins are too grave and too many; nothing that you do, even to stripping the skin from your flesh, can make satisfaction for them. Your constitution is delicate, you have lived softly, a lifetime's habits are not easily conquered." Dismayed by these and similar arguments, the unhappy man quits the struggle, not knowing how easily God's omnipotent goodness could



overthrow all these obstacles, since he wills that no man should perish. Instead there is final impenitence, the greatest crime of all, an unforgivable blasphemy. In his agitation he is either swallowed up by excessive sadness and lost in a deep depression from which he will never have the consolation of emerging, in accord with scripture's saying that the wicked man shows only contempt when caught in the midst of evils; or he will dissimulate, flatter himself with false reasonings and, as far as in him lies, surrender irrevocably to the world, to find his pleasure and delight in what advantages it offers. But just when he believes that he has peace and security, misfortunes of all kinds will overwhelm him and he will not escape. Thus despair, the greatest evil of all, follows on ignorance of God.

2. The Apostle says that there are some who have no knowledge of God. My opinion is that all those who lack knowledge of God are those who refuse to turn to him. I am certain that they refuse because they imagine this kindly disposed God to be harsh and severe, this merciful God to be callous and inflexible, this lovable God to be cruel and oppressive. So it is that wickedness plays false to itself, setting up for itself an image that does not represent him. What are you afraid of, you men of little faith? That he will not pardon your sins? But with his own hands he has nailed them to the cross. That you are used to soft living and your tastes are fastidious? But he is aware of our weakness. That a prolonged habit of sinning binds you like a chain? But the Lord loosens the shackles of prisoners. Or perhaps angered by the enormity and frequency of your sins he is slow to extend a helping hand? But where sin abounded, grace became superabundant. Are you worried about clothing and food and other bodily necessities so that you hesitate to give up your possessions? But he knows that you need all these things. What more can you wish? What else is there to hold you back from the way of salvation? This is what I say: you do not know God, yet you will not believe what we have heard. I should like you to believe those whom experience has taught, for "if you do not believe you will not understand." Not everyone however, has faith.

3. God forbid that we should think the bride has been admonished on the grounds of ignorance of God, for she has been gifted not merely with great knowledge of him who is both her Bridegroom and God, but with his friendship and familiar intercourse. She has enjoyed his frequent colloquys and kisses, and with a daring born of this intimacy can say to him: "Tell me where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon". It is not he that she demands to be shown, but the place where his glory dwells, although his domicile and his

glory are no other than himself. But he thinks fit to reprove her on account of her presumption, and hints that she lacks self-knowledge by judging herself ready for a vision so great: in her excitement she may have overlooked that she was still living on this earth, or hoped against hope that even while still in this earthly body she could draw near to his inaccessible brightness. Hence he at once recalls her to her senses, proves her ignorance to her, and reprimands her boldness: "If you do not know yourself," he told her, "go forth." Here the Bridegroom speaks to his beloved not as a bridegroom, but with the awesome tones of a master. He is not venting his anger; his intention is to inspire the fear that purifies, that by this purification she may be made ready for the vision she longs for. It is a vision reserved for the pure of heart.

4. How aptly he describes her as beautiful, not in every sense, but beautiful among women; a qualification meant to restrain her, to enable her to know her limitations. I believe that by women he means people who are sensual and worldly, people devoid of manliness, whose conduct lacks both fortitude and constancy, people who are entirely superficial, soft and effeminate in their lives and behavior. But the person who is spiritual, although enjoying a beauty that comes from following the ways of the Spirit rather than the ways of the flesh, will still fall short of perfect beauty by the fact of living in the body. Hence the bride is not beautiful from every aspect, but beautiful among women, among people whose ideals are worldly, people who, unlike herself, are not spiritual; but not among the angels in their bliss, not among the Virtues, the Powers, the Dominations. And just as one of the Fathers was said to be a man of integrity among his contemporaries, surpassing all of his time and generation, and Tamar is shown to be righteous when compared with Judah, that is, more righteous than he, and the tax collector in the Gospel is said to have gone down from the temple at rights with God rather than the Pharisee, and even as the great John was once magnificently acclaimed as having no rival for greatness, but only among those born of women, not among the blessed choirs of heavenly spirits, so the bride is declared beautiful now, but, for the time being, among women, and not among the blessed spirits of heaven.

5. Therefore as long as she is on earth she must cease from searching too curiously into the nature of the things of heaven, lest by intruding on God's majesty she be overwhelmed by glory. As long as she lives among women she must refrain from prying into the truths that are proper to the citizens of heaven, truths that are visible to them alone, lawful for them alone; heaven's realities are

for its citizens. "The vision that you ask for, Bride of mine, is above your capacity, you are as yet unable to gaze upon that sublime noontide brightness that is my dwelling place. You have asked where I pasture my flocks, the place where I rest at noon. But to be drawn up through the clouds, to penetrate to where light is total, to plunge through seas of splendor and make your home where light is unapproachable, that is beyond the scope of an earthly life or an earthly body. That is reserved for you at the end of all things, when I shall take you, all glorious, to myself, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Do you not know that as long as you live in the body you are exiled from the light? With your beauty still incomplete how can you consider yourself fit to gaze on beauty in its totality? And why should you want to see me in my splendor, while you still do not know yourself? Because if you had a better knowledge of yourself you would know that, burdened with a perishable body, you cannot possibly lift up your eyes and fix them on this radiant light that the angels long to contemplate. The time will come when I shall reveal myself, and your beauty will be complete, just as my beauty is complete; you will be so like me that you will see me as I am. Then you will be told: "You are all fair my love, there is no flaw in you." But for now, though there is some resemblance, there is also some want of resemblance, and you must be content with an imperfect knowledge. Be aware of what you are, do not hanker after truths that are too high for you, nor for experiences beyond your power to bear. Otherwise, you do not know yourself, O beautiful among women - for ever I give you the title beautiful, but beautiful among women, with a beauty that is imperfect. When the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. Therefore, "If you do not know yourself..." But the words that follow have been dealt with, and there is no need to deal with them again. I promised to put some helpful thoughts before you about the two kinds of ignorance; if I have failed to satisfy you fully, give me credit for my good-will. For I certainly have the will to do it, but the means to accomplish it I do not have, except in so far as the Church's Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ, enables me by his kindness to work for your well-being. May he be blessed for ever. Amen.

### **SERMON 39 THE DEVIL AND HIS ARMY**

"To my company of horsemen amid Pharaoh's chariots have I likened you, O my love." For a start we are free to infer from these words that the Fathers prefigured the Church, and that the mysteries of our salvation were foreshown to them. The

grace of baptism that both saves men and washes sins away, is clearly expressed in the exodus of Israel from Egypt, when the sea performed that twofold marvel of service in providing a passage for the people and taking vengeance on their enemies. "Our fathers were all under the cloud," said St Paul, "and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." But as usual I must show the sequence of the words, the connection between the present text and those we have already dealt with, and draw from them as well as I can some consoling doctrine to improve our lives. So when the bride is harshly rebuked for her presumption, lest she succumb to sadness, she is reminded of the favors she has already received and promised that others are to come. He even acknowledges again her beauty and calls her his love. "My love," he says, "if I have spoken to you harshly, do not suspect me of hating you or of being spiteful, for the very gifts with which I have honored and adorned you are clear signs of my love for you. Far from intending to withdraw them I shall add still more."

Or he could say it this way: "My love, do not be disappointed that your request is not being answered now; you have already received quite a lot from me, and even greater favors will be yours if you follow my directions and persevere in my love." The text may thus be linked up with the previous ones.

2. Now let us see what those gifts are that he says he has bestowed on her. The first is that he has compared her to his horsemen amid Pharaoh's chariots: by putting to death all the flesh's sinful tendencies he has freed her from the bondage of sin, just as his people were freed from the slavery of Egypt when the chariots of Pharaoh were overturned and swallowed up in the sea. That is surely a very great mercy, and I shall not be foolish if I wish to glory in having received it. I speak only the truth. I declare and will go on declaring: "If the Lord had not been my help, my soul would soon have found its dwelling in hell." I am neither ungrateful nor forgetful, I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever. But this is as far as I compare myself with the bride. As for the rest, by a unique privilege after her deliverance she has been accepted as his beloved and adorned with a splendor befitting the Lord's own bride, but for the present time only on the cheeks and neck. She has been promised necklaces for ornamentation, made of costly gold, inlaid with beautiful silver. Can anyone not be entirely pleased with such an endowment? Firstly his mercy sets her free, secondly he favors her with his love, thirdly he makes her clean and pure, and finally he promises to enrich her with gems of rarest quality.

3. I have no doubt that some of you understand what I am saying from your own experience, which enables you even to anticipate my words. But running through my mind is the verse: "The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple," and because of these I feel that a little more extensive treatment is justified. For wisdom is a kindly spirit that is pleased with a teacher who is kind and diligent, who, despite his anxiety to gratify his intelligent students, does not hesitate to adapt himself to the backward ones. Wisdom herself says that they who explain her shall have life everlasting, a reward I would by no means be deprived of. For even those matters whose meaning seems obvious have certain aspects that can be obscure, and time is not wasted in discussing them in more detail with capacious and quick-witted minds.

4. But now let us take a look at the comparison drawn from Pharaoh and his army and the horsemen of the Lord. The comparison is not between the two armies, they are merely the basis of it. For light and darkness have nothing in common, the faithful no partnership with the unfaithful. But there is a clear comparison between the person who is holy and spiritual and the horsemen of the Lord, and between Pharaoh and the devil and both their armies. And do not be surprised that one person is compared to a company of horsemen, for if that one person is holy an army of virtues is at hand: well-ordered affections, disciplined habits, prayers like burnished weapons, actions charged with energy, awesome zeal, and finally unrelenting conflicts with the enemy and repeated victories. Hence in later texts we read: "Terrible as an army set in array," and "What shall you see in the Shulamite but the companies of the camps?" If this explanation fails to satisfy you, then recall that the spiritual person is never without a company of angels who display a divine jealousy in guarding her for her husband, to present her to Christ as a pure bride. And do not say to yourself: "Where are they? Who has seen them?" The prophet Elisha saw them and obtained by his prayers that Gehazi should see them, too. You do not see them because you are neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. The patriarch Jacob saw them and exclaimed: "This is God's camp." The Teacher of the Nations saw them and said: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation? "

5. The bride therefore, progressing on her course with the support of ministering angels, with the aid of the heavenly host, does resemble the horsemen of the Lord that by a stupendous miracle of divine power once triumphed over the chariots of Pharaoh. If you pay careful attention, the wonder aroused in you by

the magnificent achievements in the Red Sea can still be aroused by the achievements of today. Rather her victories today are even more magnificent, for the physical exploits of that occasion find spiritual fulfillment now. Surely you see that greater courage is shown and greater glory achieved in overthrowing the devil rather than Pharaoh, in conquering spiritual powers rather than Pharaoh's chariots? There the battle was waged against flesh and blood; here it is waged against sovereignties and powers, against the forces that control this world's darkness, the spiritual army of evil in the heavens. Let us examine together the details of this comparison. There you have a people rescued from Egypt, here man is rescued from the world; there Pharaoh is vanquished, here the devil; there Pharaoh's chariots are overturned, here the passions of the flesh that attack the soul are being undermined; there it was the waves that triumphed, here our tears; the former with the sea's might, the latter in bitterness. If the demons encounter a soul of this quality I can hear them now crying out: "Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord is fighting for him."

Would you wish me to designate some of Pharaoh's captain's by their proper names, and describe his chariots for you, so that you may discover for yourselves if there be any others like them: One mighty captain of the spiritual and invisible king of Egypt is Malice, another is Sensuality, another Avarice. Each of them possesses, under his king, the territory assigned to him. Malice therefore is in command wherever the wicked commit their crimes, Sensuality presides over shameful rites of lust, while thievery and fraud are within the domain of Avarice.

6. And now let us look at the chariots prepared by Pharaoh for his princes to persecute the people of God. Malice has a chariot with four wheels named Cruelty, Impatience, Recklessness and Impudence. This chariot's swift sorties mean the shedding of blood, nor can it be stopped by innocence, nor delayed by patience, nor checked by fear nor inhibited by shame. It is drawn by two vicious horses ready to destroy as they go, earthly Power and worldly Pomp. They are the source of its dazzling speed, for Power gallops where evil beckons, and Pomp courts popular favor in pursuit of dishonest ends. Hence the Psalmist says that the sinner is praised for his evil desires and the dishonest man gets a blessing; hence, too, the other words: "This is your hour and the power of darkness." And these two horses are driven by two coachmen called Arrogance and Envy; Arrogance drives Pomp, Envy urges on Power. The former is borne rapidly along by a diabolical love of vain display that fills his heart. But the man

with genuine self-possession, who is prudently circumspect, seriously concerned about modesty, firmly established in humility, wholesomely chaste, will never be lightly carried away by this empty wind. In like manner the beast of earthly Power is driven by Envy, urged on by jealousy's spurs, by worry about possible failure and the fear of being surpassed. One spur is the haunting fear of being supplanted, the other the fear of a rival. These are the goads by which earthly Power is ever disquieted. This is what one finds in the chariot of Malice.

7. The chariot of Sensuality also rolls along with four vices for wheels: Gluttony, Lust, Seductive Dress and Enervation, that is, the offspring of sloth and inertia. And it is drawn by two horses, Prosperous Life and Abundance of Goods. The two coachmen are Lazy Languor and False Security, for wealth is the ruin of the slothful and Scripture says that the prosperity of fools destroys them, not because they are successful but because it gives them false security. "When people say, 'there is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them." These coachmen have neither spurs nor whips nor any instrument of this kind; instead they carry a canopy for shade and a fan to freshen the air. The canopy's name is Dissimulation, and its purpose to provide a shade to ward off the heat of human cares. A person used to soft, effeminate ways will dissemble even when faced with necessary cares, and rather than experience life's perplexing troubles he will conceal himself in the thickets of dissimulation. The fan is Permissiveness, that stirs up flattery like a breeze. For voluptuaries have liberal hands and buy with their gold the flattery of the sycophant. I shall say no more on this subject.

8. Avarice, too, has vices for its four wheels: Pusillanimity, Inhumanity, Contempt of God, Forgetfulness of Death. The beasts to which it is yoked are Obstinacy and Rapacity, and one coachman drives them whose name is Greed for Gain. Avarice is a solitary vice that cannot endure many retainers; one servant suffices. But he is a prompt and tireless executor of the task in hand, lashing his horses onward with cruel whips called Craving to Acquire and Fear of Loss.

9. The ruler of Egypt has still other captains whose chariots are used in their lord's service, for example Pride, who is one of the more important captains, along with that enemy of the faith, Impiety, whose position is so influential in Pharaoh's palace and kingdom. Besides these, Pharaoh's army contains many officers and nobles of inferior rank whose number is almost countless. What their names are and their duties, their armor and equipment, I leave to you yourselves

to pursue as a project of study. But trusting in the prowess of these captains and their chariots, the invisible Pharaoh rushes to and fro, inspired by a tyrannical rage, as he directs his attacks with all the power he can muster against the entire family of God. Even in these very days he is persecuting the people of Israel as they escape from Egypt. And these, neither supported by chariots nor clad in armor, but strengthened solely by the hand of God, sing out with confidence: "I will sing to the Lord for he has gloriously triumphed; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea." "Some boast of chariots and some of horses, but we boast of the name of the Lord our God." Now you have heard what I wished to say on the suggested comparison between the horsemen of the Lord and the chariots of Pharaoh.

10. In this text he calls her his love. He was her lover even before she was freed from sin, for if he had not loved her he would not have set her free; it was through this gift of freedom that she was won over to become his love. St John's words explain it: "It was not that we loved him, but first he loved us." Recall the story of Moses and the Ethiopian woman and see that even then there was a foreshadowing of the union between the Word and the sinner. Try to identify too if you can, what you savor most in pondering on this sweetest of mysteries: the most benign gesture of the Word, or the unfathomable glory of the soul, or the unpredictable confidence of the sinner. Moses could not change the color of his Ethiopian wife, but Christ could. For the text continues: "Your cheeks are beautiful as the turtle dove's." But this must wait for another sermon, so that always eagerly partaking of the food provided for us on the Bridegroom's table, we may continue to praise and glorify him, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is God blessed for ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 40 THE FACE OF THE BRIDE**

"Your cheeks are beautiful as the turtle dove's." The bride's modesty is a delicate thing; and I feel that at the Bridegroom's reproof a warm flush suffused her face, so heightening her beauty that she immediately was greeted with: "Your cheeks are beautiful as the turtle dove's." You must not give an earthbound meaning to this coloring of the corruptible flesh, to this gathering of blood-red liquid that spreads evenly beneath the surface of her pearly skin, quietly mingling with it to enhance her physical beauty by the pink and white loveliness of her cheeks. For



the substance of the soul is incorporeal and invisible, possessing neither bodily limbs nor any visible coloring. Try then as best you can to grasp the nature of this spiritual entity by means of a spiritual insight; and to conserve the fittingness of the proposed comparison take note that the mind's intention is the soul's face. The quality of work is evaluated from the intention, just as the body's beauty from the face. We may see in this flush on the cheek an unassuming disposition in which virtue and beauty thrive and grace increases. "Your cheeks then are beautiful as the turtle dove's" When describing her beauty he referred as is customary to her face, for when a person's beauty is praised the normal thing to say is that she has a beautiful or comely face; though I cannot see what was the purpose of speaking of cheeks in the plural except that it cannot have been without a purpose. For the one who speaks is the Spirit of Wisdom, who performs no action, not even the smallest, in vain, nor speaks except according to his nature. Whatever it be, there is a reason why he prefers to speak of cheeks in the plural than of face in the singular. And unless you can offer something better, I shall give you my view of the reason.

2. The intention which we have referred to as the face of the soul must have two elements: matter and purpose, what you intend and why. It is from these two that we judge the beauty or deformity of the soul, and hence the person in whom they are found correct and pure may justly and truly be told: "Your cheeks are beautiful as the turtle dove's." But she who lacks one of these cannot be complimented that her cheeks are beautiful as the turtle dove's, because of her partial deformity. Much less can it be suitably said to one who possesses neither of these qualities. But all this will become more clear by giving examples. If, for instance, a person makes up his mind to pursue the truth, and that solely from a love of truth, is it not obvious that for him both matter and motive are equally correct and that he had achieved the right to be told that his cheeks are beautiful as the turtle dove's, since on neither cheek does an unbecoming blemish appear? But if his reason for pursuing the truth is self-glorification or the attainment of some worldly advantage, then even though one of his cheeks should seem perfectly formed, I feel you would not hesitate to consider him partially deformed because of the baseness of the motive that disfigures the other cheek. But if you discover a man who has no good motives, who is entangled in the net of sensual desire, a glutton and voluptuary like those whose god is the belly, who glory in their shame, whose minds are set on earthly things: what of him? If his intention is vitiated both in matter and motive will you not judge him to be totally repellent?

3. Therefore to direct one's mind completely to worldly pursuits rather than toward God is the sign of a worldly person whose cheeks are totally devoid of beauty. To direct one's mind as it were toward God but not for the sake of God, betrays the attitude of the hypocrite, one of whose cheeks may seem attractive because of a vaunted concern for God, but whose presence nullifies every form of attractiveness and contaminates the whole with its ugliness. Again, if one directs one's mind to God solely or chiefly because of the necessities of the present life, I cannot say that it stinks with the dregs of hypocrisy, but it is so befogged by pettiness of spirit that it cannot merit acceptance. On the contrary, to give one's attention to something other than God, although for God's sake, means to embark on Martha's busy life rather than Mary's way of contemplation. I do not say that this soul is deformed, but it has not attained to perfect beauty, for it worries and frets about so many things, and is bound to be stained to some degree with the grime of worldly affairs. This however is quickly and easily cleansed at the hour of a death made holy by the grace of a pure intention and a good conscience. And therefore, to seek God for his own sake alone, this is to possess two cheeks made most beautiful by the two elements of intention. This is the bride's own special gift, the source of that unique prerogative by which she may be told with all propriety: "Your cheeks are beautiful as the turtle dove's. "

4. But why as the turtle dove's? This is a chaste little bird that leads a retired life, content to live with one mate; if it loses this mate it does not seek another but lives alone thence forward. In order that you who hear me may not hear in vain the doctrines that were written for your sake, that now for your sake are being examined and discussed: you I say who are moved by the urgings of the Holy Spirit and long to perform all that is required of one who would be the bride of God, strive to ensure that both elements of your intention are like two beautiful cheeks; then, in imitation of that most chaste of birds, and following the advice of the Prophet, abide in solitude because you have raised yourself above yourself. You are well above yourself when espoused to the Lord of angels; surely you are above yourself when joined to the Lord and become one spirit with him? Live alone therefore like the turtle dove. Avoid the crowds, avoid the places where men assemble; forget even your people and your father's house and the king will desire your beauty. O holy soul, remain alone, so that you might keep yourself for him alone whom you have chosen for yourself out of all that exist. Avoid going abroad, avoid even the members of your household; withdraw from friends and those you love, not excepting the man who provides for your needs. Can you not

see how shy your Love is, that he will never come to you when others are present? Therefore you must withdraw, mentally rather than physically, in your intention, in your devotion, in your spirit. For Christ the Lord is a spirit before your face, and he demands solitude of the spirit more than of the body, although physical withdrawal can be of benefit when the opportunity offers, especially in time of prayer. To do this is to follow the advice and example of the Bridegroom, that when you want to pray you should go into your room, shut the door and then pray. And what he said he did. He spent nights alone in prayer, not merely hiding from the crowds but even from his disciples and familiar friends. He did indeed take three of his friends with him when the hour of his death was approaching; but the urge to pray drew him apart even from them. You too must act like this when you wish to pray.

5. Apart from that the only solitude prescribed for you is that of the mind and spirit. You enjoy this solitude if you refuse to share in the common gossip, if you shun involvement in the problems of the hour and set no store by the fancies that attract the masses; if you reject what everybody covets, avoid disputes, make light of losses, and pay no heed to injuries. Otherwise you are not alone even when alone. Do you not see that you can be alone when in company and in company when alone? However great the crowds that surround you, you can enjoy the benefits of solitude if you refrain from curiosity about other people's conduct and shun rash judgment. Even if you should see your neighbor doing what is wrong, refuse to pass judgment on him, excuse him instead. Excuse his intention even if you cannot excuse the act, which may be the fruit of ignorance or surprise or chance. Even if you are so certain that to dissemble is impossible, you must still endeavor to convince yourself by saying: "It was an overwhelming temptation; what should become of me if it attacked me with the same force?" Remember too that all this time I have been speaking to the bride, not to the friend of the Bridegroom, who has another reason for keeping careful watch to prevent his charge from sinning, to examine if sin has been committed, and to administer correction when it has. The bride is free from this kind of obligation, she lives alone for the love of him who is her Bridegroom and Lord, who is God blessed for ever. Amen.

## **SERMON 41 THE INTELLECT, FAITH AND CONTEMPLATION**

"Your neck as jewels." Normally the neck is adorned with jewels, not compared to them. For Those who wear jewelry have no beauty of their own, and must go to another source to beg its outward show that they might make it deceptively their own. But the neck of the bride is so beautiful in itself, so exquisitely formed by nature, that any external adornment is superfluous. Why load it with a pretentious coloring of strange baubles when its own native loveliness is so complete, more than equal to the splendor of any jewels that could be found to enrich it? This is what the Bridegroom wished to convey, for he did not say, as one would expect, that the jewels were suspended round her neck, but that it was "as jewels." Here we must call upon the Holy Spirit, that just as his love enabled us to discover the spiritual cheeks of the bride, so it may also reveal to us the spiritual mystery of the neck. And to my mind, for I can only say what I think, nothing seems more credible or probable than that the word neck signifies the soul's intellect. I feel that you too will support this interpretation when you examine the reason for the comparison. Do you not see that the function of the neck somehow resembles that of the intellect, by which your soul receives its vital spiritual nourishment, and communicates it to the inward faculties of the will and the affections? And so when this neck of the bride, understood as the pure and simple intellect, is radiant through and through with the clear and naked truth, it has no need of embellishment; on the contrary it is itself a precious jewel that becomingly adorns the soul, which is why it is portrayed as resembling jewels. The truth is a jewel of great excellence, so are purity and candor, and especially the power to make a sober estimate of oneself. The intellect of rationalists and heretics is not endowed with this radiance of purity and truth; hence they spend time and energy in primping and festooning it with the tinsel of words and tricks of sophistry, lest it be seen for what it is, and the shame of its falseness be revealed as well.

2. The text continues: "We will make you ornaments of gold, studded with silver." If it were "I will make" in the singular and not "we will make" in the plural I should declare unconditionally and unhesitatingly that the Bridegroom was the speaker here too. But perhaps it would be more appropriate to assign it to his companions, who try to console the bride with the promise that until she can see in the beatific vision him for whom she longs so ardently, they will make her beautiful and costly pendants for her ears. The reason for this I think is that faith comes by hearing: as long as she walks by faith and not by sight she must put more reliance on the ear than on the eye. It is pointless for her to strain toward this vision with eyes that the faith has not yet purified, since it has been promised

as a reward to those alone who are clean of heart. It is written "By faith he cleanses men's hearts." Therefore, since faith comes by hearing, and through faith the power of vision is clarified, it is but right to concentrate on adorning her ears, because reason here tells us that hearing is a preparation for seeing. They say: "You long, O bride, to gaze on the glory of your Beloved; but that belongs to another time. For now we suspend these pendants from your ears, to console you while you wait and even to prepare you for that vision to which you lay claim." Their words echo the Psalmist's: "Hear, O daughter, and see." "You long for the power to see, but you must first listen. To listen is to move toward vision. Listen then, bow down you ear for the pendants we are making for you, that by obedient listening you may come to the splendor of the vision. We will make your listening a thing of joy and gladness. We cannot enable you to see the vision that will be the fullness of your joy and the fulfillment of your desire: to bestow that is the privilege of the person you love." To complete your happiness he will show you himself, he will fill you with gladness by letting you see his face. But for the moment, for your consolation, take these pendants that we offer you; the delights that he holds in his right hand will remain for ever."

3. We should take note of the kind of pendants they offer her: they are made of gold and studded with silver. Gold signifies the splendor of the divine nature, the wisdom that comes from above. The heavenly goldsmiths to whom this work is committed, promise that they will fashion resplendent tokens of the truth and insert them in the soul's inward ears. I cannot see what this may mean if not the construction of certain spiritual images in order to bring the purest intuitions of divine wisdom before the eyes of the soul that contemplates, to enable it to perceive, as though puzzling reflections in a mirror, what it cannot possibly gaze on as yet face to face. The things we speak of are divine, totally unknown except to those who have experienced them. While still in this mortal body, while still living by faith, while the content of the clear interior light is still not made clear, we can, in part, still contemplate the pure truth. Any one of us who has been given this gift from above may make his own the words of St Paul: "Now I know in part;" and: "We know in part and in part we prophesy." But when the spirit is ravished out of itself and granted a vision of God that suddenly shines into the mind with the swiftness of a lightning-flash, immediately, but whence I know not, images of earthly things fill the imagination, either as an aid to understanding or to temper the intensity of the divine light. So well-adapted are they to the divinely illumined senses, that in their shadow the utterly pure and brilliant radiance of the truth is rendered more bearable to the mind and more capable of being

communicated to others. My opinion is that they are formed in our imaginations by the inspirations of the holy angels, just as on the other hand there is no doubt that evil suggestions of an opposite nature are forced upon us by the bad angels.

4. Perhaps, too, we have here those puzzling reflections seen by the Apostle in the mirror and fashioned, as I have said, by angelic hands from pure and beautiful images, which I feel bring us in contact somehow with the being of God, that in its pure state is perceived without any shadow of corporeal substances. The elegance of the imagery that so worthily clothes and reveals it I attribute to angelic skill. That this is so is more distinctly conveyed by another version: "We, the artificers, will make you images of gold, with silver decorations." "With silver decorations" and "studded with silver" mean the same thing. To me they seem to signify not merely that the angels produce these images within us, but that they also inspire the elegance of diction which so fittingly and gracefully embellishes with greater clarity and keener enjoyment our communication of them to the audience. And if you ask me what connection there is between speech and silver, I give you the Prophet's answer: "The words of the Lord are pure words: silver refined in a crucible." This is how these ministering spirits from heaven fashion ornaments of gold studded with silver for the bride to wear during her earthly pilgrimage.

5. Take note however that she yearns for one thing and receives another. In spite of her longing for the repose of contemplation she is burdened with the task of preaching; and despite her desire to bask in the Bridegroom's presence she is entrusted with the cares of begetting and rearing children. Nor is this the only time she has been so treated. Once before when she sighed for the Bridegroom's kisses and embraces she was told: "Your breasts are better than wine," to make her realize that she was a mother, that her duty was to suckle her babes, to provide food for her children. If indolence does not prevent you from trying, perhaps you too can discover further similar instances in other verses of this Song. Was it not prefigured long ago in the life of the holy Patriarch Jacob, when, instead of the long-awaited embraces of his desired Rachel, beautiful though barren, he was given, against his will and contrary to his plans, one who was fecund but blear-eyed? So now too, the bride, as she is eagerly enquiring to learn where her Beloved pastures his flock and rests at noon, is given instead ornaments of gold studded with silver, gifts of wisdom and eloquence, and committed to the work of preaching.

6. We learn from this that only too often we must interrupt the sweet kisses to feed the needy with the milk of doctrine. No one must live for himself but all must live for him who died for all. Woe to those who are gifted with the power to think and speak worthily of God if they imagine that godliness is a means for gain, if they make vain-glorious use of the talents given them for the winning of souls to God, if in their high-mindedness they refuse to associate with the lowly. Let them fear what the Lord said by the mouth of his Prophet: "I gave them my gold and my silver; but they have used my gold and my silver in the service of Baal." For your part, listen to the bride's reply when she receives on the one hand a reproof, on the other a promise. She is neither puffed up by promises nor angered by the rebuke, but exemplifies the scriptural saying: "Reprove a wise man and he will love you." With reference to gifts and promises we are also told: "The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself in all things." That she was faithful to these principles will be clear from her reply. But a discussion on this must be postponed, if you do not mind, to await another sermon, and for what has been said so far let us give glory to the Church's Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God blessed for ever. Amen.

#### **SERMON 42 FRATERNAL CORRECTION - TWO KINDS OF HUMILITY**

"While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance." These are the bride's words that we have left until today. This is the answer she gave when rebuked by the Bridegroom, not to the Bridegroom however but to his companions, as can easily be gathered from the words themselves. For since she does not address him directly and say: "When you were on your couch, O King," but: "when he was on his couch," it is clear that she does not speak to him but of him. Try to imagine therefore how the Bridegroom, seemingly after he had reproved or repulsed her, sees the blush of shame that covers her cheeks and departs from the room to give her the opportunity to express her feelings freely. If, as often happened, she yielded more than was becoming to dismay and depression, his companions would console and re-assure her. Not that he omits to do this himself, but he waits for the opportune moment. And to show clearly how pleasing to him she was even while correcting her, for she bore that correction becomingly and in the proper spirit, he could not depart till he had praised the beauty of her cheeks and neck in words that came from his heart. Hence those who remain with her, knowing what the Lord has in mind, try to

charm her out of her sadness and present her with gifts. Her words then are addressed to them. This is how they fit within the context.

2. But before attempting to extract the kernel of spiritual truth from this shell, I make one brief remark.

Happy the Superior who finds a reaction to his reprimand similar to the example given here. Far more desirable that there should never be a need to reprimand! That would be the better thing. But because "we all make many mistakes," and duty obliges me to correct those who err, I may not remain silent; and indeed love impels me to act. And if, in the fulfilling of my duty, I do correct someone only to see that my reprimand fails entirely to achieve its purpose, echoing its futility back to me like a javelin that strikes and recoils, what do you think, brothers, are my feelings then? Am I not frustrated! Am I not angered! Because of my own lack of wisdom let me quote the words of a Master: "I am caught in a dilemma and know not what to choose." Should I be complacent about what I have said because I have done my duty, or perform a penance for what I have said because I have failed in my purpose? For I wished by overthrowing an enemy to rescue a friend, and did not do so; rather the contrary happened, I have offended him and set him deeper in the wrong. He now despises me. "They will not listen to you," said the Prophet, "because they will not listen to me. Note the greatness of him who is involved in this contempt. Do not imagine that you have despised only me. The Lord has spoken, and what he said to the Prophet he also said to the Apostles: "He who despises you, despises me." I am neither prophet nor apostle, but I dare to say that I fulfill the role both of prophet and apostle; and though far beneath them in merits I am caught up in similar cares. Even though it be to my great embarrassment, though it put me at serious risk, I am seated on the chair of Moses, to whose quality of life I do not lay claim and whose grace I do not experience. What then? That one must withhold respect for the chair because the man sitting there is unworthy? But even though the Scribes and Pharisees be seated on it, Christ has said: "Do what they tell you."

3. Quite often impatience is joined to the contempt, so that the man rebuked not only neglects to amend but is even angry with his corrector, like a madman who spurns his doctor's hand. What extraordinary perversity! While refusing to be angry with the archer who shot him, he is angry with his physician! That one who shoots in the dark at the spright of heart has now shot the death-blow into your own self; and you fail to react against him? Yet you are annoyed with me when



all I want is to put you right! "Be angry but do not sin," Scripture says. If your anger is directed against your sin, not only do you not sin but you destroy the sin you had committed. Now however you add sin to sin by spurning the remedy in this senseless fit of anger; this is a sin of special malice.

4. Sometimes the anger is spiced with impudence, as when the correction is not only met with impatience but the error impudently defended. This is obvious recklessness. God can say to such a man: "You have a harlot's brow, you refuse to be ashamed;" and again: "My jealousy will depart from you, I shall be angry with you no more." Merely to hear these words makes me shudder. Do you not feel how perilous it is, how horrible and frightening, to defend one's sin? For God also says: "All whom I love I reprove and discipline." If God's jealous anger has turned away from you, so also has his love; if you think yourself unfit for his chastisement, you will not be fit for his love. It is when God does not show his anger that he is most angry: "We have shown favor to the wicked," he says, "and he does not learn righteousness." This kind of favor is not for me. To be spared on these terms is worse than any anger, it leaves me shut off from the paths of righteousness. Better for me to follow the Prophet's advice and learn discipline, lest the Lord be angry and I fall away from the true path. I prefer that you be angry with me, O Father of Mercies, but with that anger by which you put the sinner right rather than drive him off the path. A correction benignly administered begets the former, an ominous concealment of your anger leads to the latter. It is not when I am ignorant of your anger but when I feel it, that I trust most in your goodwill for me, because when you are angry you will remember to be merciful. "You were a forgiving God to your people," according to the Psalmist, "but an avenger of their wrong-doings." He is speaking of Moses and Aaron and Samuel whom he had previously mentioned, and considers it a mercy that God did not spare their waywardness. But you? Go on defending your error and condemning the correction, and cut yourself off from this mercy forever! But that is surely to call evil good and good evil. And out of this odious impudence shall we not soon see emerging the buds of impenitence, the mother of despair? For who will repent of what he thinks good? Woe to them the Prophet says. And that woe is for eternity. It is one thing for a person to be tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire, but quite another to freely pursue evil as good, to speed toward death with a false security as if on the way to life.

For this reason I should sometimes prefer to remain silent and pretend I had not seen some wrong being done, rather than to bring about so great a calamity by a

reprimand.

5. Perhaps you will tell me that my good deed will redound to my welfare; that I have freed my own soul and am innocent of the blood of that man in speaking and warning him to turn away from his evil path that he might live. But though you give me countless reasons they will not comfort me because my eyes rest on a son who is dying. It is as if by that reprimand I sought to achieve my own salvation rather than his. Where is the mother who will be able to restrain her tears when she sees her ailing son at the point of death, even if she knows she has devoted all possible care and attention to him, but in vain, since all her efforts now come to nothing? She weeps because death takes him from her for a time. How much more should I weep and lament for the eternal death of a son of mine even if I am conscious of no failure on my part, even though I have warned him? You see then how great the evils from which a man delivers both himself and me when he responds with meekness on being corrected, submits respectfully, obeys modestly, and humbly admits his fault. To a man like this I shall in all things be a debtor, I shall minister to and serve him as a genuine lover of my Lord, for he is one who can truly say: "while the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance."

6. How good the fragrance of humility that ascends from the valley of tears, that permeates all places within reach, and perfumes even the royal couch with its sweet delight.

The nard is an insignificant herb, said by those who specialize in the study of plants to be of a warm nature. Hence it seems to be fittingly taken in this place for the virtue of humility, but aglow with the warmth of holy love. I say this because there is a humility inspired and inflamed by charity, and a humility begotten in us by truth but devoid of warmth. This latter depends on our knowledge, the former on our affections. For if you sincerely examine your inward dispositions in the light of truth, and judge them unflatteringly for what they are, you will certainly be humiliated by the baseness that this true knowledge reveals to you, though you perhaps as yet cannot endure that others, too, should see this image. So far it is truth that compels your humility, it is as yet untouched by the inpouring of love. But if you were so moved by a love of that truth which, like a radiant light, so wholesomely discovered to you the reality of your condition, you would certainly desire, as far as in you lies, that the opinions of others about you should correspond with what you know of yourself. I say, as

far as in you lies, because it is often inexpedient to make known to others all that we know about ourselves, and we are forbidden by the very love of truth and the truth of love to attempt to reveal what would injure another. But if under the impulse of self-love you inwardly conceal the true judgment you have formed of yourself, who can doubt that you lack a love for truth, since you show preference for your own interest and reputation?

7. Convicted by the light of truth then, a man may judge himself of little worth, but you know this is far from the equivalent of a spontaneous association with the lowly that springs from the gift of love. Necessity compels the former, the latter is of free choice. "He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant," and so gave us the pattern of humility. He emptied himself, he humbled himself, not under constraint of an assessment of himself but inspired by love for us. Though he could appear abject and despicable in men's eyes, he could not judge himself to be so in reality, because he knew who he was. It was his will, not his judgment, that moved him to adopt a humble guise that he knew did not represent him; though not unaware that he was the highest he chose to be looked on as the least. And so we find him saying: "Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart." He said "in heart;" in the affection of the heart, which signifies the will, and a decision arising from the will excludes compulsion. You and I truly know that we deserve disgrace and contempt, that we deserve the worst treatment and the lowest rank, that we deserve punishment, even the whip; but not he. Yet he experienced all these things because he willed it; he was humble in heart, humble with that humility that springs from the heart's love, not that which is exacted by truthful reasoning.

8. So then, I have said that we attain to this voluntary humility not by truthful reasoning but by an inward infusion of love, since it springs from the heart, from the affections, from the will; you must judge whether I am right. But I also submit to the scrutiny of your judgment the rectitude by which I attribute this to the Lord, who under love's inspiration emptied himself, under love's inspiration was made lower than the angels, under love's inspiration was obedient to his parents, under love's inspiration bowed down under the Baptist's hands, endured the weakness of the flesh, and became liable to death, even the ignominious death of the cross. And one more thing I ask you to consider: whether I have been correct in assuming that this humility, aglow with love, is symbolized by that lowly plant, the nard. And if you do assent to all these opinions - and you must give assent to evidence that is so manifest - then if you feel humiliated by that inescapable

sense of unworthiness implanted by the Truth that examines both heart and mind in the very being of one who is attentive, try to use your will and make a virtue of necessity, because there is no virtue without the will's co-operation. You will achieve this if you do not wish to appear externally in any way different from what you discover in your heart. Otherwise you must fear that you will read your fate in words like the following: "He flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated." For "diverse weights and diverse measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord." What am I getting at? Will you despise yourself in your own heart when you weigh yourself in the balance of God's truth, and yet deceive the public with a different estimate by selling yourself to us at a greater weight than Truth has indicated? Let the fear of God prevent you from attempting anything so despicable as to commend the man whose unworthiness is revealed by God's truth: for this is to resist the truth, to fight against God. You must rather submit to God and let your will be docile to the Truth; and more than docile, even dedicated. "Was not my soul subject to God," said the Psalmist.

9. It counts for little, however, that you are submissive to God, unless you be submissive to every human creature for God's sake, whether it be the abbot as first superior or to the other officers appointed by him. I go still further and say: be subject to your equals and inferiors. "It is fitting," said Christ, "that we should in this way do all that righteousness demands." If you seek an unblemished righteousness, take an interest in the man of little account, defer to those of lesser rank, be of service to the young. Doing this you may dare to say with the bride: "My nard gave forth its fragrance."

That fragrance is the fervor of your life, the good repute in which all men hold you, so that you might be the good odor of Christ in every place, seen by all, loved by all. Such influence is beyond the man whose humility is compelled by the truth; he is so caught up in self-interest that it cannot flow out so that it will spread abroad. His life bears no fragrance because he lacks fervor, his humility is neither free nor spontaneous. But the bride's humility, like the nard, spreads abroad its fragrance, the warmth of its love, the vigor of its fervor, the inspiring power of its good name. The bride's humility is freely embraced, it is fruitful and it is forever. Its fragrance is destroyed neither by reprimand nor praise. She has heard: "Your cheeks are beautiful as the turtle dove's, your neck like strings of jewels." When promised pendants of gold she acquiesced with humility; the more she is honored the more she humbles herself in all things. She does not boast of her merits nor forget her humility when she hears her praises multiplied. Under

this name of nard she humbly vows her lowliness in the spirit of the Virgin Mary's words: "I am unaware of any merit that would warrant all this honor, except that God has been pleased with the lowliness of his handmaid." What else can she mean by saying: "My nard gave forth its fragrance," than that my lowliness was pleasing to him? It was not any wisdom of mine, not any nobility, not any beauty, for these meant nothing to me; it was my humility alone that gave forth fragrance, in its accustomed way. God is habitually pleased with humility; the way of the Lord is to look down lovingly on the humble from the heights of heaven; and therefore while the king was on his couch, in his dwelling-place in the heavens, the fragrance of my humility mounted even to the presence of him of whom the Psalmist says: "He dwells on high and takes account of the lowly things in heaven and on earth."

10. Therefore: "while the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance."

The king's couch is the heart of the Father, because the Son is always in the Father. Never doubt of the mercy of this king, whose eternal resting place is the abode of the Father's love. What wonder that the cry of the humble should reach to him whose dwelling-place is at that source of all kindness, where his happiness is most intimate and his goodness consubstantial with that of the Father; for he receives all that he is from the Father, and the timorous glance of the lowly will see in his royal power nothing that is not fatherly. Therefore the Lord says: "Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan, I will now arise." The bride knows this because she is a well-loved member of his household; she knows that her Bridegroom's favors will not be limited by the poverty of her merits, for she puts her trust solely in her lowliness. Yet she gives him the title of king, for while smarting from the reprimand she does not dare to call him Bridegroom. He is said to dwell on high, but this does not weaken the trust that permeates her humility.

11. You may very suitably apply the text of this sermon to the early church, if you recall those days when, after the Lord had ascended to where he was before and seated himself at the Father's right hand, on that ancient, magnificent and glorious couch, the disciples came together in one place, persevering with one mind in prayer along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers. Do you not feel that was a time when the nard of the tiny and timorous bride gave forth its fragrance? And when suddenly a sound came from heaven

like the rush of a mighty wind and filled all the house where they were sitting, could she not say in her littleness and indigence: "While the king was on his couch my nard gave forth its fragrance"? All who lived in that place clearly perceived the ascent of that fragrance of humility, so agreeable and so welcome, and the immediate response of a rich and glorious reward. Nor was the bride ungrateful for that favor. For hear: no sooner is she possessed by the ardor then she professes herself ready to endure any evil for the sake of his name, for the following text runs: "My beloved is to me a bunch of myrrh that lies between my breasts." But I feel too weak to speak any further. I shall say that under the name of myrrh she includes all the bitter trials she is willing to undergo through love of her beloved. Some other time we shall continue with the remainder of the text, provided that the Holy Spirit will be attentive to your prayers and enable me to understand the words of the bride, since he himself has inspired and composed them in a way befitting the praises of him whose Spirit he is, the Church's Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God blessed for ever. Amen.

#### **SERMON 43 THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST**

"My beloved is to me a little bundle of myrrh that lies between my breasts." Recently he was king, now he is the beloved; recently he was on his royal couch, now he lies between the breasts of the bride. This illustrates the great power of humility, to which the God of majesty will so gladly yield. In a moment reverence has given way to friendship, and he who seemed so distant has been quickly brought close. "My Beloved is to me a little bundle of myrrh." Because myrrh is a bitter herb it symbolizes the burdensome harshness of afflictions. Foreseeing that the service of her beloved makes them inevitable, she speaks with a sense of gladness, trusting that she will undergo them all with courage. "The disciples left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus." Hence she refers to the beloved by the diminutive endearment, "bunch," not bundle, to indicate that the love she bore him would make light of imminent hardship and pain. How apt the word bunch, for he is born to us an infant. Apt, too, in another sense, because "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." What today is a bunch of myrrh will become one future day an immense profusion of glory. A bunch surely, if its yoke is easy and

its burden light. Not that it is of its nature light - there was nothing light about the cruel passion or the bitter death —only the lover finds it light. Hence she does not say: "My Beloved is a bunch of myrrh;" but rather he is a bunch of myrrh "to me," because I love. That is why she calls him "beloved," to show that the power of love can prove superior to all the miseries of suffering for "love is strong as death." As proof, too, that she does not glory in herself but in the Lord, that she does not presume on her own strength but on his, she says that he will lie between her breasts. To him she sings with safety: "Even though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death I will not fear evil because you are with me."

2. I remember saying in one of my previous sermons that the breasts of the bride signified a sharing in joy and a sympathy in suffering, like the Pauline prescription to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep. And because her life swings between extremes of good fortune and bad, with peril lurking on both sides, she wants to find her beloved midway between these breasts, so that fortified against both by his unceasing protection, she may not be proud in prosperity nor depressed in sorrow. You too, if you are wise, will imitate the prudence of the bride, and never permit even for an hour that this precious bunch of myrrh should be removed from your bosom. Preserve without fail the memory of all those bitter things he endured for you, persevere in meditating on him and you in turn will be able to say: "My beloved is to me a little bunch of myrrh that lies between my breasts."

3. As for me, dear brothers, from the early days of my conversion, conscious of my grave lack of merits, I made sure to gather for myself this little bunch of myrrh and place it between my breasts. It was culled from all the anxious hours and bitter experiences of my Lord; first from the privations of his infancy, then from the hardships he endured in preaching, the fatigues of his journeys, the long watches in prayer, the temptations when he fasted, his tears of compassion, the heckling when he addressed the people, and finally the dangers from traitors in the brotherhood, the insults, the spitting, the blows, the mockery, the scorn, the nails and similar torments that are multiplied in the Gospels, like trees in the forest, and all for the salvation of our race. Among the teeming little branches of this perfumed myrrh I feel we must not forget the myrrh which he drank upon the cross and used for his anointing at his burial. In the first of these he took upon himself the bitterness of my sins, in the second he affirmed the future incorruption of my body. As long as I live I shall proclaim the memory of the abounding goodness contained in these events; throughout eternity I shall not

forget these mercies, for in them I have found life.

4. These are the mercies that King David once begged for with tears as he said: "Let your mercies come to me that I may live." And another of the saints sighed as he recalled these, and said: "The mercies of the Lord are many." What a multitude of kings and prophets desired to see, and did not! They worked hard, and I have entered into the reward of their labors. I have reaped the myrrh that they had planted. This life-giving bunch has been reserved for me; no one will take it away from me, it shall lie between my breasts.

I have said that wisdom is to be found in meditating on these truths. For me they are the source of perfect righteousness, of the fullness of knowledge, of the most efficacious graces, of abundant merits. Sometimes I draw from them a drink that is wholesomely bitter, sometimes an unction that is sweet and consoling. When I am in difficulties they bear me up, when I am happy they regulate my conduct. For anyone traveling on God's royal road, they provide safe guidance amid the joys and sorrows of this life, warding off impending evils on every side. These win me the favor of him who is the world's judge, revealing him, despite his awesome powers, as one who is gentle and humble. Though beyond the reaches of princes and filling kings with fear, he is yet not one who only forgives but even offers himself as an example to follow. Hence as you well know, these sentiments are often on my lips, and God knows they are always in my heart. They are a familiar theme in my writings, as is evident. This is my philosophy, one more refined and interior, to know Jesus and him crucified. I do not ask, as the bride did, where he takes his rest at noon, because my joy is to hold him fast where he lies between my breasts. I do not ask where he rests at noon for I see him on the cross as my Savior. What she desired is the more sublime, what I experience is the more sweet. Her portion was bread that satisfies the hunger of children, mine is the milk that fills the breasts of mothers; therefore I shall keep it between my breasts.

5. Dear brothers, you too must gather this delectable bunch for yourselves, you must place it in the very center of your bosom where it will protect all the avenues to your heart. Let it abide between your breasts. Always make sure it is not behind you on your shoulders, but ahead of you where your eyes can see it, for if you bear it without smelling it the burden will weigh you down and the fragrance will not lift you up. Be mindful that this is the Christ that Simeon took in his arms; whom Mary bore in her womb, fostered in her lap, and like a bride placed



between her breasts. And not to leave anything out, he was present too in the prophetic words of Zechariah and of many others. And I can imagine how Mary's husband Joseph would often take him on his knees and smile as he played with him. For all these people he was to the fore, not behind. They are an example for you, do as they did. If you carry him where your eyes can rest on him you will find that the sight of his afflictions will make your burdens lighter, helped as you will be by him who is the Church's Bridegroom, God blessed for ever. Amen.