

THE SUNDAY SERMONS OF THE GREAT FATHERS

VOLUME ONE

Dr Toal's work contains what is in effect the spiritual inheritance of every Christian. The four volumes together give, Sunday by Sunday and for the greater festivals and fasts, selected sermons of the great Fathers and Doctors of the Church.

In the framing of the great corpus of Catholic doctrine and theology, the authority and the influence of the Fathers are secondary only to those of the Apostles and Evangelists themselves. To one we owe the true interpretation of facts or phrases, to another the unfolding of a doctrine out of a single word; to all of them the handing on and enrichment of a tradition which runs back to the foundation of the Church. Their homilies on the liturgical Gospels for Sundays and the greater feasts and fasts cannot fail to add clarity and depth to any reader's understanding of these key passages from holy scripture; and this treasury of their commentaries will above all be of constant help to priests whose office it is to preach and expound the Gospel in the continuance of the tradition.

An especially valuable point is the inclusion, after the printed text of each Gospel reading, of the relevant passage of the *Catena Aurea* or *Golden Chain*, the great commentary on the Gospels compiled by St Thomas Aquinas from the writings of all the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. This has not hitherto been available in English.

The four volumes correspond with the four liturgical divisions of the year. This first volume was recently published in a large format under the title *Patristic Homilies on the Gospels* and is now reissued in a small and handy pocket size. The subsequent volumes will appear in the same small format for the individual user and, simultaneously, in a large format for libraries.

Semper redeundum ad divinae revelationis Fontes; quod depositum Divinus Redemptor concedidit authentice interpretandum soli Ecclesiae Magisterio.

Pope Pius XII,

Encyclical *Humani Generis*,

12 August 1950.

THE
SUNDAY SERMONS
OF THE GREAT
FATHERS

VOLUME ONE
*From the First Sunday of Advent
to Quinquagesima*

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
M. F. TOAL, D.D.

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TO
THE MOST REVEREND FATHER
MICHAEL BROWNE, O.P.
MASTER GENERAL OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS
FORMERLY
THE MASTER OF THE SACRED PALACE
THE INSPIRER OF THIS WORK
THIS SECOND EDITION OF THE HOMILIES
OF THE GREAT FATHERS IS
GRATEFULLY AND RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

FOREWORD

THE author of the present work has had as his purpose to put into the hands of his fellow priests material of incomparable value, in a form easy of access, with a view to aiding them in the sacred ministry of preaching. This apostolic ministry is the one on which all else depends in the mission of the Church for the salvation of souls.

A large portion of it will always consist in homilies on the Gospels of the Sundays and Principal Feasts. Father Toal, in this first volume, has in view this sector of the preacher's work. For the Gospel of each Sunday and Feast he has brought together from the most reliable sources, and translated, all that he thought to be best and most useful in the homilies and expositions of the Fathers and of the Angel of the Schools.

Nothing more suited to his noble purpose could be conceived. The word of God contained in Scripture, and especially in the Gospels, has been given to the Church for the instruction of men. Sacred Tradition guided by the Spirit of God has expounded it in the writings of the Holy Fathers and Doctors.

Father Toal has placed in the easiest possible reach of the busy priest this treasure house of sacred lore, this quintessence of the doctrine of Tradition on each Gospel. What he supplies may, of course, not be all that may be usefully known in relation to it, but it is, and by long odds, the most important thing. A sermon well prepared on the matter here supplied cannot fail to be learned, solid, simple and effective.

What more can be said in praise of the utility of Father Toal's contribution? We shall all be grateful to him, and *his reward will indeed be great.* (Mt. v. 12.)

MICHAEL BROWNE, O.P.

Vatican

24 November, 1954

PREFACE

He opened their minds, and gave them power to understand the Scriptures
(Lk.xxiv. 45.)

The supreme mission imposed by Christ on His Apostles was to preach the Gospel to every creature. In virtue of this mission, they to whom the command was given, and those to whom it descends, speak with authority and power in the things of God: the power being in the word given them (1 Cor. ii. 4). And this alone do men wish to hear from those so commanded: the word of God in the Gospel of Christ. It is now their birthright: that wherein they hope, the source of faith, the bond of charity; "for it is in the Gospel that the form of Catholic faith, and the rule of the whole Christian life, is chiefly laid down."¹

But it may happen that where the Faith is well established the preaching of the Gospel may no longer be regarded as an urgent task. Indeed it has come about that many, whose duty this is, do not fulfil it; though not as a rule through indifference or neglect. Various immediate reasons for this do arise, through particular circumstances, but there may possibly be a general underlying reason: a deterrent, simple, effective, but not realized, arising from the manner in which the Gospel sermons are prepared.

In training the future preachers of the Gospel there is a fairly general tradition of dependence, as to form, on the great court preachers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and on their imitators. The acknowledged masterpieces of pulpit oratory of this period, elaborate, sustained, elegant, are widely used as models in seminaries and ecclesiastical colleges. Students are encouraged to imitate them; their first efforts at preaching are invariably formed on them. Afterwards, as priests, they continue to prepare their own sermons on these lines, and come to regard these forms, involving the building of a somewhat elaborate verbal structure, as the sole method of Gospel preaching.

It was no doubt fitting that in that day and circumstance the word of God should be so splendidly presented. And it is easy to see how such nobility of style and utterance caused these discourses to be taken as models, as the text books of pulpit oratory for the centuries

that followed. But we have to recognize that they were the product of a particular time and a particular environment. Also that they were addressed mainly to a leisured and cultivated audience, and invariably lack a sense of urgency. Roundabout in manner, appealing as much to the refined intellect as to the will, they are without simplicity and directness. It has been evident for a long time that popular appreciation of this style has departed. Such sermons weary. There has been a sharpening of men's minds: so many things now claim their attention, the wisdom and distractions of the world coming in at every door. The abiding human need is for a message that is, like the Gospel itself, urgent, simple, direct.

Thus, many preachers who know no other style find themselves out of key with their hearers. To them it seems that the people are at fault. But such is not the case. The fault lies with themselves. True it is that many replace the exposition of the Gospel with systematic catechetical instructions on the truths of the Faith and on the formal doctrines of the Church. This, in itself, is indeed a most grave pastoral duty, and one which may in given circumstances become an even more pressing duty than the exposition of the Gospels. Yet, as St Jerome says: "Ignorance of the Scriptures leads to ignorance of Christ";² and many who may have mastered the full teaching of the Church, and indeed many who may be incapable of understanding it, will yet hunger for the food of the Word, and the tender divine wisdom of the parables, and thirst for *the living stream, that maketh joyful the city of God* (Ps. xlv, 5).

We must return to the preaching of the Gospel in its own simplicity; to the simplicity of those who first spread the Gospel message, and who received their rule of interpretation in direct line from the Apostles. From the beginning we have had our models, in the divine discourses themselves. They are simple, without loftiness. In them there is no vagueness, no elaboration. It is men who mystify, because of ignorance; and elaborate, because of vanity. Where Jesus is instructing the people there is no word or figure a child may not follow; words fitting thought as close as light lies to the earth. He is also brief: blessed brevity, that knows how to compassionate the weak and wandering minds of men.³

We must return to this simplicity that we may preach the Gospel in a manner that is acceptable to all men. But this will not be easy. The simplicity of the Gospel, if one may say so, is a deceiving simplicity; for it is the simplicity of pure divine wisdom, using simple human words. And the inner content of these words is not easy to grasp. In various ways it must be sought for, striven for. It is hidden from the proud, and from those whose hearts are held by this

world. To those, however, who love and serve God the message of the Gospel will appear ever more deep and wide and inexhaustible.

Yet this is the preachers' task: to make this message known. To do this they must seek to understand it, word for word. Each single word, whether noun or verb or preposition, and even the numbers spoken of, has its own deep and special significance, which may not be loosely or rashly interpreted. And how can they see this *unless someone shows it to them?* Here we have need of guides. And in a duty so sacred, so responsible, not everyone that presents himself is an acceptable guide. "Here it is required among the dispensers of the mysteries of God, that a man be found a faithful dispenser."⁴ *Dearly beloved*, says St John, *believe not every spirit, but try the spirits if they be of God* (I Jn. iv. 1, 6). Only such guides may be followed as the Church approves: for it is to the Church that the custody of the word of God has been confided.⁵

In the providence of God we have such guides: "Holy and illustrious men, whom we call the Fathers and Doctors of the Church those most shining lights whom God willed to shine in the firmament of His Church, so that by means of them the darknesses of the heretics might be dispelled. Men such as Irenaeus, Cyprian, Hilary, Athanasius, Basil, the two Gregorys, Ambrose, Jerome, Chrysostom, Augustine, Cyril. These are the Bishops and Shepherds, sober, learned, holy, who drank in the Catholic Faith with their mothers' milk, ate it with their food, who have ministered this food and this drink to great and simple. It was by means of such planters, cultivators, builders, shepherds, and teachers, that, since the Apostles, the Church has grown."⁶

Add to these great names that of Leo, Pope and Doctor, prince of the homilists, and most impressive of the Fathers, whose brief sermons affirm over and over again, in words of grave authority, simplicity, and earnestness, the need for the Christian formation of men's lives, by the simple means of prayer, fasting, and almsdeeds. Add likewise Gregory, surnamed the Great, also Pope and Doctor, who joins to the same authority a most tender insight, as he brings the mysteries of God, and the new manner of the Gospel living, into the pattern of daily life. Add lastly, though first in time, the great Origen, "who, among the Easterns, holds chief place, in the liveliness of his mental powers, and the wondrous constancy of his labours, from whose manifold writings almost all have since drawn."⁷

These then are our guides; they who can say with the beloved Disciple: *We are of God, he that knoweth God heareth us*. These alone may we follow; and the reasons for this are of great moment.

Firstly, because, from the fruit of their lives, and by the attestation of the Church, we know that they were men of great holiness of life, and accordingly, ever responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit; not concerned with wordly wisdom. To such the word of God is made clear: to the pure of heart, who, loving God, would never depart from his inspirations, nor teach, or write, except in accordance with His holy truth.

Again, they are, apart from the teaching *magisterium* of the Church, our supreme witnesses as to the content of that sacred deposit of divine revelation which ended with the last of the Apostles; instructors who "acquired their understanding of the Holy Scriptures, not by their own lights and ideas, but from the writings and authority of the Ancients, who, in their turn, as we know, received their rule of interpretation in direct line from the Apostles."⁸

Besides their holiness and authority they were men who had devoted their great natural powers to the study of all Scripture. *Now, all Scripture inspired of God, is profitable to each* (2 Tim. iv. 16). But no explanation of the Gospels can be truly profitable which is not in harmony with the Scriptures of the Old Testament, "for the witness of both Old and New Testaments run together unto our instruction; for that which the trumpet of the prophet signalled, the deeds of the Gospel now make evident, even as it was written: *Deep calleth to deep, in the voice of thy floodgates* (Ps. xli. 8): and to show forth the glory of God, the deeps of either Testament call unto each other: and what was hidden beneath the cloak of figure, now in the unveiled Light shines clear."⁹

The final reason, which crowns all the rest, is that they are not alone witnesses of authority, sanctity, and learning, regarding the sacred mysteries of the Faith and the meaning of the holy Gospels, but also that they speak with harmonious voices, in a chorus that rises from every side, from age to age, proclaiming together what was made known from the beginning. In the progress of this holy revelation, by means of the teaching of the Church, the divine truth entered into certain minds of grace, power, and wisdom. Minds which saw deeply into its mystery, and unfolded what they saw, and taught it to others, and passed it on in their writings; not adding to it, not enlarging it, by the absorption of extraneous human wisdom, but solely making clear that which was uttered for our enlightenment by those who first revealed and taught it, namely: Christ the Lord, and after Him His holy Apostles.

Because of this last reason we have, in this work, immediately following the Gospel text, given its word for word exposition, taken from all the Fathers, and compiled at the command of supreme

authority, by the purest and most powerful mind that has flowered in the bosom of the Church. In this compilation the commentary of the Holy Fathers and Doctors on each successive word of the Gospel, has been linked together in a golden chain of witness and sacred wisdom. The work to which I refer is the *Catena Aurea* of St Thomas Aquinas, the Angel of the Schools: a miracle of wisdom and knowledge, and possibly the least known of all the saint's works.

The purpose and method of this work is best explained in St Thomas' own words, in his dedicatory preface, which I here append. Regarding the method of abbreviation he uses, and of which he makes particular mention, it will be of interest to know that in verifying the quotations that make up the *Catena Aurea*, I found that the saint in citing, for example, St Augustine, would compend an entire homily of the latter into two or three modest paragraphs. Yet, with so much cut away, it was impossible to find an essential point of the homily omitted, or a word cited that was deprived of its relative significance within the homily.

At this point it is desired to affirm, that it is far from the author's mind to imply that we must return to the early ages to find again the true spirit of the Church, or to find there something that is missing from the life of the Church today. Than this, nothing could be further from the truth. For that which then enriched the Church, namely: the divinely promised assistance of the Holy Spirit, is the same which fructifies it today, and every day, until the end of time. Here in this work it is a question simply of the fuller use of the riches of Tradition, which, together with the Scriptures, form the sacred deposit of the Faith. And then as now there was one Voice, "one supreme teaching Authority, whose sacred task it was to guard, preserve, interpret, the whole deposit of faith, not only Sacred Scripture, but Tradition, which is no less divine in origin,"¹⁰ namely the Church, so that nothing was innovated in practice, nothing explicitly taught, unless what was handed down from the beginning.

We may well indeed, oftentimes, turn our minds to those first ages of struggle and persecution, and draw encouragement from the manner in which the early Christians faced a darkness, a universal reign of evil, such as has never since existed, and which, by the power of the Christian spirit, they both overcame and transformed; fulfilling in this Christ's prophetic parable of the leaven, which transformed to its own virtue the mass in which it was buried. In this there is a divinely prophetic intimation of the efficacy and purpose of the Christian leaven, the Christian life, which is apt to be overlooked in the striving for formal achievement.

These then are the guides we have gathered into this first, and shall, we hope, gather into the three succeeding volumes of this work. The homilies presented, except in a few indicated instances, are given in their entirety, and they are translated from the best texts now available. They can be used either for direct preaching as they stand, or for reading to the faithful, as was an ancient and widespread custom, or they may be used as models for the preacher's personal exposition of the Gospels.

And they are, we venture to say, models and sermons to which the people will listen eagerly, as they listened to them long ago. And this because they proceed from minds filled with the love of God and His holy word, as well as by its knowledge and understanding. And they were written by men upon whom the Church has conferred the authority of Doctors, and of Teachers, of the Faith; holding their writings as channels, along which has come untarnished the pure stream of the saving divine Truth.

I desire here to pay a tribute of veneration and gratitude to the memory of a great patristic scholar, Father Francois Combefis, O.P. What is perhaps his greatest work, the *Bibliotheca Patrum Concionatoria*, has been the guide in this present undertaking. This work, published in Paris in 1662, in eight tomes, is a vast compilation of patristic exposition and homilies, selected and arranged for the liturgical year. This plan, and in good part this selection, I have followed here, using, however, the later and more critical texts.

My attention was drawn to this treasure, and to the need to make something similar available to the English speaking world, by another member of the Order of Preachers, the Most Reverend Father Michael Browne, O.P., the present Master of the Sacred Apostolic Palace. I owe him, and here offer him, my warme thanks; for it is to his carefully deliberated suggestion, and to his encouragement and counsel, that this presentation of Patristic Homilies directly owes its existence. I desire also to thank him for his goodness in writing the Foreword to this first volume.

I wish also to thank the Reverend Father John Chrysostom Baur, O.S.B., at present of the Vatican Library, the contemporary authority on St John Chrysostom, for his much valued advice regarding the authenticity of many of the homilies of the saint which I have included here.

I desire also to express my deep thanks to the authorities of the Vatican Library. It is impossible to convey the value, even to the humblest searchers, of the great resources, and amenities, of the

Library: and in this latter I include the courtesy and helpfulness of its officials, including, particularly, the *bidelli*, who so cheerfully assist and guide all who come to use its treasures. To His Eminence, Cardinal Mercati, and to the Prefect, the Right Reverend Abbot Albareda, O.S.B., I offer my respectful homage and very sincere gratitude.

M. F. TOAL

Collegio Teutonico

Vatican

Easter Sunday, 1955

NOTES

¹ St Thomas Aquinas, Introduction to the *Catena Aurea*.

² Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, 1893: St Jerome in Isa. Prol. (PL 24, 17) EB, 86.

³ "What is desired in the explanation of the Holy Scripture is, not elaborate discourses, adorned with oratorical flowers, but knowledge and the simplicity of truth." St Jerome; cf. Encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus*, 1920, (PL, 24, 1058 C); EB, 487.

⁴ Cf. *Spiritus Paraclitus*, EB, 487: 1 Cor. iv. 2.

⁵ "Speaking in the Church there is grave danger, lest the Gospel of Christ become, through distorted interpretation, the Gospel of a man," *Spiritus Paraclitus*, citing St Jerome, in Comm. in Gal.; where he comments on Psalm xlix. 16, 17 (PL, 26, 322 D); EB, 487.

⁶ St Robert Bellarmine, Sermon on the Doctors of the Church, Roman Breviary, Feast.

⁷ Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*.

⁸ *Prov. Deus*. Rufinus PL 21, 518.

⁹ St Leo M. PL 54, Sermo. 60.

¹⁰ Cf. Encyclical *Humani Generis*, 1950.

REFERENCE LIST OF DOCTORS AND FATHERS IN THIS WORK

The Four Great Eastern Doctors of the Church

1. St Basil the Great, Confessor, Archbishop of Caesarea. A.D. 330-379.
2. St Gregory Nazianzen, Confessor, Patriarch of Constantinople. 329-390.
3. St John Chrysostom, Confessor, Archbishop of Constantinople. 354-407.
4. St Cyril of Alexandria, Confessor, Patriarch of Alexandria. Died 444.

The Four Great Western Doctors of the Church

1. St Ambrose, Confessor, Bishop of Milan. A.D. 339-397.
2. St Jerome, Priest and Confessor, Author of the Vulgate. 347-420.
3. St Confessor, Confessor, Bishop of Hippo. 354-430.
4. St Gregory the Great, Pope and Confessor. 540-603.

The supreme Doctor and Witness of Divine Tradition in all that relates to the Person of *Christ the Son of the living God* is St Leo the Great, Confessor, and Successor of St Peter. Died A.D. 461.

Alphabetical list of Doctors, Fathers of the Church, and Ecclesiastical Writers, Teachers and Preachers of the Gospel of Christ, and Witnesses of the Divine Tradition. The names occur principally in the Catena Aurea.

1. Ælred of York, Abbot, Homilist and Historian. A.D. 1109-1166.
2. Alcuin Albinus, Educator, Theologian. 735-804.
3. Amphilochius, St, Archbishop of Iconium, Greek Father. A.D. 339-400.
4. Anastasius, St, Abbot of Mt Sinai, Ecclesiastical Writer. Died 700.
5. Anselm, St, Archbishop of Canterbury, Doctor of the Church. 1033-1109.
6. Antipater, Bishop of Bostra (Syria), Ecclesiastical Writer. Died c. 460.
7. Anthony, St, Abbot, Founder of Christian Monasticism. 251-356.
8. Asterius, St, Bishop of Amasea, Pontus, Greek Father. Died c. 410.
9. Athanasius, St, Patriarch of Alexandria, Doctor of the Church. 296-373.
10. Bede, The Venerable, Priest and Confessor, Doctor of the Church. 672-735.

11. Bernard, St, Abbot of Clairvaux, Doctor of the Church. 1090-1153.
12. Caesarius, St, Bishop of Arles, Preacher. 470-543.
13. Clement, St, Martyr, Third Successor of St Peter, Apostolic Father.
+ c. 90.
14. Clement of Alexandria, Ecclesiastical Writer. Died c. 215.
15. Cyprian, St, Martyr, Bishop of Carthage, Father of the Church.
+ 258.
16. Cyril, St, Confessor, Bishop of Jerusalem, Doctor of the Church.
318-386.
17. Didymus of Alexandria (*The Blind*), Great Teacher. 310-395.
18. Dionysius, St, The Great, Patriarch of Alexandria, Father of the
Church. 190-264.
19. Ephraem, St, Confessor and Deacon, Doctor of the Church. + 373.
20. Epiphanius, St, Metropolitan of Cyprus, Greek Father. 315-403.
21. Eucherius, St, Bishop of Lyons, Scriptural and Ascetic Writer. + 450.
22. Eusebius, St, Bishop of Caesarea, Father of Church History. 260-341.
23. Fulgentius, St, Bishop of Rûspe (Africa), Theologian. 468-533.
24. Gaudentius, St, Bishop of Brescia, Father of the Church. + 410.
25. Gregory, St, Confessor (*The Miracle-Worker*), Bishop of Neo-
caesarea, Father of the Church. A.D. 213-270.
26. Gregory, St, Bishop of Nyssa, Confessor, Doctor of the Church.
+ 394.
27. Haymo, Bishop of Halberstadt, Homilist. Died 858.
28. Hesychius, Priest of Jerusalem, Ecclesiastical Writer. Died 472.
29. Hilary, St, Confessor, Bishop of Poitiers, Doctor of the Church.
+ 358.
30. Hilary, St, Bishop of Arles, Father of the Church. 401-409.
31. Ignatius, St, Martyr, Bishop of Antioch, Apostolic Father. 50-117.
32. Ildefonsus, St, Bishop of Toledo, Ecclesiastical Writer. + 667.
33. Joannes (Geometra), Greek Ecclesiastical Writer. c. 600-700.
34. John Damascene, St, Priest, Greek Father, 676-754.
35. Josephus, Flavius, Jewish Historian. A.D. 37-101.
36. Irenaeus, St, Martyr, Bishop of Lyons, Father of the Church. + 202.
37. Isidore, St, Abbot of Pelusium (Egypt), Ecclesiastical Writer, Disciple
of Chrysostom. + 450.
38. Ivo, St, Bishop of Chartres. 1040-1116.
39. Justin, St, Martyr, Apostolic Father. 100-165.
40. Maximus Confessor, St, Abbot, Greek Doctor. 580-662.
41. Maximus, St, Bishop of Turin, Homilist. 380-465.
42. Melito, Bishop of Sardis (Asia Minor), Father of the Church. + 190.
43. Methodius, St, Martyr, Bishop of Tyre, Father of the Church. Died
311.
44. Origenes, Priest and Confessor, Father of the Church. A.D. 185-253
45. Pacianus, St, Bishop of Barcelona, Ecclesiastical Writer. + 390.
46. Patrick, St, Bishop, Confessor, Apostle of Ireland. + 432.
47. Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, Ecclesiastical Writer. 353-431.
48. Peter Chrysologos, St, Bishop of Ravenna, Doctor of the Church.
+ 450

49. Peter, Abbot of Cluny. + 1157.
50. Proclius, St, Patriarch of Constantinople, Greek Doctor. + 446.
51. Remigius of Auxerre, Ecclesiastical Writer. + 908.
52. Sidonius Apollinaris, Bishop of Clermont, Ecclesiastical Writer. 430-480.
53. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, Ecclesiastical Writer. 560-638.
54. Sozomenus, Church Historian. + 447.
55. Sylvester, St, Pope and Confessor, Father of the Church. + 335.
56. Symeon Metaphrastes, Hagiographer of Greek Church. Late tenth century.
57. Tertullian, Ecclesiastical Writer. 160-220.
58. Theoderet, Bishop of Cyprus, Greek Father. 393-457.
59. Theophanes, St, Chronicler. 758-817
60. Theophylactus, Patriarch of Bulgaria, 765-840.
61. Thomas Aquinas, St, Confessor and Doctor of the Church. 1225-1274.
62. Titus, Bishop of Bostra, Ecclesiastical Writer. + 378.
63. Victor of Antioch, Priest, Ecclesiastical Writer. + 450.
64. Victorinus, St, Martyr, Ecclesiastical Writer. c. + 303.
65. Zeno, St, Bishop of Verona, Father of the Church. + 372.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ABBREVIATIONS

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Migne's Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Graeca. Edition Paris 1886. Vols. 161 Series Latina. Edition Paris 1844-66. Vols. 221	PG PL
Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (<i>current</i>)	CSEL
Catena Aurea of St Thomas Aquinas	CA
Catena Sexaginta-quinque Graecorum Patrum in Lucam, Quae Quatuor simul Evangelistarum intro- duxit Explicationem. Luce ac latinitate donata a Balthasare Corderio Soc. Jesu. Antwerp 1628	Catena GP
Catena Patrum Graecorum in S. Joannem, ex antiquissi- mo Graeco codice MS nuncprimum in lucem edita, a Balthasare Corderio Soc. Jesu. Antwerp 1630	Catena GP
Graffin, Patrologia Syriaca	GPS
Sancti Epraem Syri. Hymni et Sermones, Lamy, Malines 1882	
Vossio, Sti Ephraem Syri Opera Omnia, Cologne 1616	Vossio S. Eph.
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Denzinger, Enchiridion Symbolorum 1928	Denz.
Enchiridion Biblicum, 1954	EB
Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique	DTC
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Pour Revaloriser Migne, Tables Rectificatives, par Mgr. Glorieux, Lille 1952	PRM
A Glossary of Later Latin to A.D. 600, compiled by Alexander Souter, Oxford 1949	GLL
Altaner, Patrologie, 1951	
Septuagint	SEPT

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CATENA AUREA

Dedicatory Epistle of St Thomas Aquinas to Pope Urban the Fourth on the publication of the Catena on the Gospel of St Matthew.

The Fount of Wisdom, the Only Begotten Word of God, through Whom, ruling from on high, the Father hath wisely wrought and sweetly ordered all things, willed at the end of ages to take upon Himself our flesh, that human vision might look upon His Splendour, clothed in the garment of our corporal nature, Which it could not rise to contemplate upon the summits of the Divine Glory.

And as He had poured out His rays, that is, the tokens of His wisdom, upon all things which He made, He impressed, as a nobler endowment, His own image and likeness on the souls of men; and yet more lovingly formed it in the hearts of those who love Him, in a manner that corresponds to the generosity of His own Love.

But what is the soul of man in this so immense creation that it can comprehend the steps of the divine wisdom? And this when the light of that wisdom, poured out on man, has been dimmed by the shadow of sin, and the confusion of earthly cares; indeed so dark became the foolish heart of many, that they changed the glory of God into the likeness of dumb idols: and being brought low by their iniquities, they did what it is not fitting that men should do.

But the Divine Wisdom, Which hath made man for the enjoyment of Itself, not suffering that he remain in this ignorance, joined our human nature to the fulness of Its own perfection, uniting it to the Word in a wondrous manner, that He might restore unto Himself all erring humanity.

The Prince of the Apostles by his faith first merited to perceive the brightness of this Wisdom, Veiled in the cloud of our flesh, and to confess It steadfastly, fully, and without error, saying: *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God* (Matt. xvi. 16). O Blessed Confession! which, not flesh and blood, but the Father Who is in heaven hath revealed. This Confession it is that makes firm the Church on earth, opens the way to heaven, merits pardon for sins; and against it the gates of hell shall not prevail.

Thy heart, Most Holy Father, who art lawful heir of this Faith

and this Confession, gives watchful care that the light of this so wondrous Wisdom may fill the hearts of the faithful, and put to silence the dread folly of heretics, fittingly referred to as the gates of hell. If indeed, as Plato says, that people must be deemed fortunate whose rulers give themselves to wisdom: and to that wisdom which the infirmity of the human mind so often stains with error: how much more fortunate must we consider the Christian people under your rule, when with such zealous care you have given yourself to that most excelling wisdom which the Wisdom of God, Clothed in our earthly members, has both taught by word, and shown by example.

And because of this care, it has pleased Your Holiness to lay on me the task of explaining the Gospel, in doing which to the best of my ability I have carefully brought together, from the various works of the Commentators, a continuous exposition of the aforementioned Gospel: adding a few words to the quotations from certain authors, words taken for the most part from glosses, which, that they may be distinguished from their actual words, I have placed under the title of Gloss.

And I have taken care that the names of the Doctors should be set down, as well as the works from which their testimonies are taken; with this exception: that the writings and commentary which treat of those places in the Gospel that are being explained, did not need particular reference. For example: where the name of Jerome is found, but without reference to any work of his, it is to be understood that he is here speaking of Matthew; and similarly with regard to others: excepting however the quotations from the Commentary of Chrysostom upon Matthew, where it was necessary to add to the title the words *Super Matthaeum*, that in this way they might be distinguished from others taken from the Homiliarist himself.

In quoting the testimonies of the saints it was necessary many times to cut away some parts so as to avoid undue length: and, for greater clearness, and according to the purpose of the commentary, to change about the actual sequence of the parts quoted. Now and then I have given their meaning, and left out words, particularly in the case of the Homiliary of Chrysostom, because of the fact that the translation is defective.

It has also been my intention in this work, to seek, not alone the literal meaning, but also to set forth the mystical: on occasion to refute error, and proclaim truth; which appears to me an indispensable task, for it is principally in the Gospel that the form of the Catholic Faith and the rule of all Christian life is laid down.

I trust that this work will not seem to anyone too lengthy. For I could not achieve all these ends without abbreviating, nor yet, should I observe brevity in every way, set out the interpretations of so many of the saints. May Your Holiness then receive this work, as the fruit of your own solicitude, and of my obedience, to examine and to correct, as you shall decide; and as from you came the command, and to you is reserved the judgment, so *unto the place from whence the rivers come, they return, to flow again* (Eccles. i. 7).

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

I. ST AMBROSE: ON THE GOSPEL

II. ST EPHRAEM: ON PATIENCE, THE SECOND COMING, AND THE
LAST JUDGMENT

III. ST LEO THE GREAT: ON THE FAST OF THE TENTH
MONTH AND ALMSGIVING

IV. ST GREGORY THE GREAT: ON THE GOSPEL

V. ST BERNARD: THE ADVENT OF THE LORD AND ITS SIX CIRCUMSTANCES

THE GOSPEL OF THE SUNDAY

LUKE xxi. 25-33

At that time, Jesus said to His Disciples: There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves; men withering away for fear, and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world. For the powers of heaven shall be moved; and then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with great power and majesty. But when these things begin to come to pass,

look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand. And He spoke to them a similitude. See the fig tree, and all the trees: when they now shoot forth their fruit, you know that summer is nigh; so you also, when you shall see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is at hand. Amen, I say to you, this generation shall not pass away, till all things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

PARALLEL GOSPELS

MATTHEW xxiv. 29-35

And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be moved: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of

MARK xiii. 24-31

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light. And the stars of heaven shall be falling down, and the powers that are in heaven, shall be moved. And then shall they see the Son of man

man in heaven: and then shall all tribes of the earth mourn: and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty. And He shall send his angels with a trumpet, and a great voice: and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the farthest parts of the heavens to the utmost bounds of them. And from the fig tree learn a parable: When the branch thereof is now tender, and the leaves come forth, you know that summer is nigh. So you also, when you shall see all these things, know ye that it is nigh, even at the doors. Amen I say to you, that this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be done. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass.

coming in the clouds, with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. Now of the fig tree learn ye a parable. When the branch thereof is now tender, and the leaves are come forth, you know that summer is very near. So you also when you shall see these things come to pass, know ye that it is very nigh, even at the doors. Amen, I say to you, that this generation shall not pass, until all these things be done. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

EXPOSITION FROM THE CATENA AUREA

There will be signs in the sun, and in the moon . . . BEDE, in *Luke Ch. 88*: Our Lord here foretells, and in their order, those things that will come to pass when the days of the nations shall have been fulfilled, saying: *there will be signs . . .* AMBROSE, in *Luke on the Second Coming*: Which signs are more clearly described in the gospel of Matthew. There, he relates that, *the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven.*

EUSEBIUS, from *Catena of Greek Fathers*: For now is the end of all perishable life, and, according to the Apostle, the outward appearances of this world will pass away and a new world will follow, in which, in place of the visible luminaries, Christ Himself will shine as the Sun and King of a new crea-

tion; and so great will be the power and splendour of this new Sun, that the sun which now shines, and the moon and the other stars, will grow dim before the face of this greater Light. CHRYSOSTOM. *Excerpta in secund. Advent. C.A.*: As swiftly as the moon and stars fade before the rising sun, so before the glorious appearance of Christ, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give her light, and the stars will fall from heaven; stripped of their former splendour; that they may be clothed with the garment of a greater light.

EUSEBIUS, as above: What will happen to the world upon the darkening of its lights, from which will arise such dread anxiety amongst men, He then goes on to tell; saying: *and upon the earth distress of nations, by reason of the*

confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves. Here He seems to teach that the starting point of the changing of the whole earth will be the drying up of its substantial moisture. For this first being consumed, or frozen, no longer will men hear the sound of the sea, nor will its waves again flood upon the seashore. And because of this universal dryness, the remaining parts of the world, not receiving their accustomed moisture from the falling rain, begin to suffer change. And since the coming of the Saviour must impose silence on these dread portents, wherein the work of God is undone, these events will precede His Coming, and the beginning of this *roaring* will be from this drying up, so that the voice of the storm, or the murmur of the sea, will never again be heard. Then will follow the *distress* of those who are left alive. Hence follows: *men withering away from fear, and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world.* What shall come upon the whole world He then declares: *for the powers of heaven shall be moved.*

THEOPHYLACTUS: Or, again: When the upper orb of creation will be changed, the lesser elements will also rightly suffer change. Hence follows: *and upon the earth distress of nations . . .*, as if He said: the sea will rage fearfully, and the sea coasts will be battered by the storm, so that terror will come upon all the people of the earth, that is, a common dread and anxiety, and they will be silent in fear and expectation of the evils now rushing upon the world. Hence *men withering away from fear, and expectation of what shall come upon the world.*

AUGUSTINE, *Ep. ad Hesych.*¹ But, you say, the miseries that afflict us compel you to say that the end is at hand, since there is now being fulfilled that which was foretold. For it is certain, you say, that there is no nation in these days that is not being assailed, or in actual torment. If then these miseries that now afflict mankind are true signs that the Lord is now about to appear, what does that mean which the Apostle says: *When they shall say: peace and security; then shall sudden destruction come upon them?* (1 Thess. v. 3).

Let us see if perhaps it be not better to understand that the events which were foretold by these words shall not be fulfilled in this manner, but rather that they will come to pass when tribulations shall be so spread through the whole world that it will affect the Church, which will be persecuted in every place, and not those who will persecute her; for it is they who will say: *peace and security.*

Now as to those evils, which you believe to be the last and most dreadful, we note that they are common to both kingdoms, namely, to that of Christ and that of the devil; since the just and the wicked are equally afflicted by them: and also that in the midst of such great evils luxurious feasts and pleasure of every kind are being indulged in. Is this not rather a burning up with concupiscence, than a withering away from fear?

GREGORY, *Hom. I in Evang.*: Whom does He call the Powers of heaven unless the Angels, Dominations, Principalities and Powers, who at the coming of the dread Judge will then be visible to our eyes, as they

sternly exact that which He, the Invisible Creator, now patiently requires of us.

THEOPHYLACTUS: Not alone shall men tremble when the world is being dissolved, but even the angels will be fearful in the presence of such terrifying destruction of the universe. Hence there follows: *For the powers of heaven shall be moved.*

EUSEBIUS: When the Son of God is about to appear in glory, to cast down the now ended tyranny of the son of sin, the gates of heaven, closed from all ages, will now by the hands of ministering angels be thrown wide open, so that the heavens shall stand revealed.

CHRYSOSTOM, Ad Olympiam Ep. 2: Whence in Job is it said (Job xxvi. 11): *The pillars of heaven tremble and dread at his beck.* What shall the little columns do when the pillars of the firmament tremble? What shall the reed in the desert endure when the cedar of paradise is stricken? **EUSEBIUS:** Or, again; the Powers of the heavens are they who rule over the visible parts of the universe, who shall now be changed that they may go on to a more perfect state. For in the new creation they will be freed from the tasks in which they now serve God in things which follow the course of change and decay.

AUGUSTINE, Ad Hesych. as above, par. 39 (in which letter Bishop Hesychius wrote asking St Augustine concerning the prophecies foretelling the end of the world and the signs preceding. Ed.): I consider that these things should be better understood in the Church, lest the

Lord Jesus may appear to be foretelling, as extraordinary events which shall foretell His Coming, things which have happened in this world even before His First Coming, so that we may not be laughed at by those who have read of even more extraordinary events in the story of mankind. For the Church is the sun and the moon and the stars, to whom it was said: *Fair as the moon, bright as the sun* (Cant. vi. 9), and she then shall not be seen, as her persecutors rage against her without measure.

AMBROSE, 10 in Luke: Many apostatizing from Christianity, the brightness of the faith will be dimmed by this cloud of apostasy: since the heavenly Sun grows dim or shines in splendour according to my faith. And as in its monthly eclipse the moon, by reason of the earth coming between it and the sun, disappears from view, so likewise the holy Church, when the vices of the flesh stand in the way of the celestial light, can no longer borrow the splendour of His divine light from the Sun of Christ. And in the persecutions it was invariably the love of this life that stood in the path of the Divine Sun. Also *the stars*, that is, men surrounded by the praise of their fellow Christians, *shall fall*, as the bitterness of persecution mounts up; which must however come to pass, until the number of the faithful is made up; for so the good are proved and the weak made known.

AUGUSTINE, as above, par. 40: What is here said, *and upon the earth distress of nations*, is not to be understood as meaning the seed of Abraham, in whom all peoples

shall be blessed (Gen. xxii. 18), but those who will stand upon the left hand side when all men are gathered together before the Judge of the living and the dead.

AMBROSE: So oppressive therefore will be the unrest of souls, that, unhappily conscious of the multitude of our offences, and fearful of the judgment to come, the very dew of baptism shall dry upon our brow. *For the powers of heaven shall be moved; and then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud.*

Again, His coming is also longed for, so that His Presence may work in the whole universe of angels as of men that which is wrought in single souls when with fitting dispositions we receive Christ. So the Powers of heaven at the Coming of the Lord of salvation will attain to an increase of grace, for He is the Lord of the Powers also, and they will tremble at this close manifestation of the fulness of His Divinity. Then too the powers who *proclaim the glory of God* (Ps. xviii) shall also be moved by this full revelation of the glory of Christ. AUGUSTINE, as above: Or, the powers of heaven shall be moved since, because of the persecutions of the godless, some even of the most steadfast among the faithful shall be filled with fear.

THEOPHYLACTUS: *And then they shall see the Son of man coming*, that is, faithful and unbelieving alike shall see Him. For both Cross and Redeemer shall shine more splendidly than the sun; hence they will be seen by all. AUGUSTINE, as above, par. 41: The saying: *coming in a cloud*, may be understood in either of two ways: either as com-

ing in the Church, as in a cloud, as even now He ceases not to come, but then it will be in great power and majesty, because more of His power and majesty will appear to the saints, to whom He will give strength, so that they shall not be overcome by such great tribulation; or, He will come in His own Body, in which He sits at the Right Hand of the Father. So, rightly must we believe that He will come, and not alone in His own Body, but also in a cloud, since as He departed from us so shall He come again; for *He was raised up: and a cloud received Him out of their sight* (Acts i. 9). And this because of what was then said by the angel: *He shall so come as you have seen Him going into heaven.*

CHRYSOSTOM, in *Catena G.F.*: For God always appears in a cloud, as according to Psalm 92, verse 2: *Clouds and darkness are round about him.* Hence also the Son of man will come in the clouds as both God and Lord, not humbly, but in the glory befitting the Godhead; accordingly he adds: *With great power and majesty.* CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, in *Catena G.F.*: Great events are to be understood in relation to each other. Just as His First Coming was in lowliness and humility, so His Second shall be in fitting majesty. GREGORY, *Hom. I in Evang.*: In power and majesty shall they behold Him, to whom when He came in lowliness they turned a deaf ear; so the more sharply will they now feel His power, the more they refused to humble their hard hearts to His clemency.

GREGORY, *Hom. I in Evang.*: Since that which He had just said had been directed against the reprobate,

He turns now to speak words of comfort to the Elect. For He adds: *When these things come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads*; as if to say: when the miseries of the world abound, *lift up your heads*, that is, rejoice in your hearts; for while the world to which you have not given your hearts is ending, the redemption you have eagerly sought is now at hand. In Sacred Scripture the head is often used to signify the mind, because as the members of the body are governed by the head, so are our thoughts governed by the mind. Therefore, to lift up the head is to raise the mind to the joys of the heavenly fatherland.

EUSEBIUS: Or, alternatively: Corporal things having passed away, there remain now only the intellectual and the heavenly, namely: the kingdom of a world that will never pass away, and the promised rewards that shall be given to the just. *But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand.* Since we have received the promises of God, in which we place all our hope, we who before were bowed down shall now raise our heads, for the redemption we have longed for will then be at hand, that namely for which *every creature is waiting*.

THEOPHYLACTUS, on *Your Redemption is at hand*: That is, perfect freedom of body and soul. For as the Lord's First Coming was for the redemption of our souls, so the Second will bring about the redemption of our bodies. EUSEBIUS: He said this to His Disciples, not as if *they* were to continue on in this life till the end of the world, but He

so spoke as to one continuing Body, to them, to us, and to posterity, which will continue in belief in Christ until the end of the world.

GREGORY, as above: That the world is to be trodden on and despised He makes clear by a timely comparison when He goes on to say: *See the fig tree and all the trees: when they now shoot forth their fruit, you know that summer is nigh; so you also, when you shall see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is at hand*; as if He said: as we know from the coming of the fruit on the trees that the summer is at hand, so from the ruin of the world it can be known that the kingdom of God is approaching. From this we may gather that the fruit of the world is ruin. To this end it germinates, that whatsoever blooms upon it, will be consumed in disaster. Happily however the kingdom of God is compared to summer, for when the clouds of winter pass, the days of our life will be resplendent in the glory of the eternal sun.

AMBROSE, in *Luke xxi*²: Matthew speaks of but a single tree, Luke of *all the trees* (Mt. xxiv. 31; Lk. xxi. 29). The fig tree has a twofold meaning; either as when the hard grows tender, or when sin abounds. Either therefore when the fruit is green on all the trees, and the fig tree branch blooms also; that is, when every tongue doth confess the Lord, confessing also the people of Israel, we must hope for the coming of the Lord, in which, as in the summer time, the fruits of the Resurrection shall be gathered in; or, when the son of iniquity shall have put on as a garland, vain and empty boast, the leaves of the

synagogic branch, we must then see that the judgment approaches: for the Lord is hastening to reward faith, and to make an end of wrong doing.

AUGUSTINE, *Ad Hesych.* as above, 44,45: When He says, *when you shall see these things come to pass*, what must we understand unless the things already mentioned? Among these He said, *and then they shall see the Son of man coming*. So, when this is seen, the kingdom of heaven is not to come, it is close at hand. But are we to say that not all the things mentioned are implied in the words, *when you shall see these things come to pass*, but only some; this in particular being excluded, *and then they shall see the Son of man*? But Matthew clearly shows there is to be no exception, saying, *so you also, when you see all these things*, among which is that the Son of man will be seen coming, understood of the coming in which He now comes in His own members, as in clouds, or in the Church, as in a great cloud.

TITUS: Or, differently, He says *the Kingdom of God is at hand*, because when these things come to pass, the end of things has not yet come, but they now move towards their end; for the actual coming of the Lord, putting an end to the power of all other rulers, prepares the way for the kingdom of God. EUSEBIUS: Just as in this life, with winter going, and the spring time following, the sun pours out its warm rays and wakens to life seeds long buried in the earth, which then shedding their first covering come forth in new and varied forms, so the glorious coming of the Only Begotten of

God, pouring forth His life-giving rays upon a new world, brings to the light, seeds long buried throughout the whole earth, that is, those now sleeping in the dust of earth (Dan. xii. 2), and with bodies more perfect than before, and death being now overthrown the life of this new world will henceforth reign for ever.

GREGORY, as above: All that was foretold was confirmed with a great pledge, when He added: *Amen, I say to you*. BEDE: He confirms strongly what He thus foretells, and, if it is lawful to say so, His oath is, that He says: *Amen, I say to you*, amen meaning, that which is true. Therefore He who is Truth Itself, says to us: I tell you the truth. And even had He not confirmed His words in this manner, He still could not have spoken falsely. But *generation* may mean, either the whole human race, or the Jews of that day.

EUSEBIUS: Or, generation may mean, the new generation of His holy Church, thus showing that there would be an enduring body of believers until that time when it would witness all these things; and they would perceive with their own eyes the events which Our Lord here foretells.

THEOPHYLACTUS: For since He had foretold that there would be commotions, and wars, and changes in the elements, as well as in other things, lest some should fear that Christianity itself would be destroyed, He goes on to say: *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away*, as though saying: should all else be brought to

nothing, my Faith shall not fail. In this He shows that He places the Church above every other creature; though all other creatures shall suffer change, the church of the faithful, and the promises of the Gospel, shall remain.

GREGORY, as above: or, alternatively: *Heaven and earth shall pass away, etc.*, as though He were to say: everything that seems to you enduring, shall not endure for eternity; and everything that with Me seems to pass away, will remain

immovable and without change. For my speech, which passes away, utters that which shall abide without change. BEDE: The heaven that will pass away is not the ethereal, or sidereal, heaven, but the aerial, after which the birds of heaven are named. If, however, the earth shall pass away, how does Ecclesiastes say, *the earth standeth for ever* (Eccles. i. 4). But it is plain that He means, that the heavens and the earth shall pass away in their present form, but that in their essence they will endure for ever.

I. ST AMBROSE: ON THE GOSPEL³

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon . . . Here is a linked chain of prophecy, and the reason of the mystery why the Jews, already twice led captive, to Babylon and to Syria, will again be captive in all the world: because they have denied Christ; and why Jerusalem, as was later seen, was to be laid waste by an invading host, and her people fall by the edge of the sword; and why all that was Judea was to be vanquished by the believing nations, by the sword of the spirit, which is the two-edged word of God.

There will be diverse signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars. These signs are expressed more clearly in Matthew: *then, says He, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven* (Mt. xxiv. 29). For, many falling away from Christianity, the brightness of faith will be dimmed by the cloud of apostasy; since the heavenly Sun grows dim, or shines in greater splendour, according to my faith. As when many together look at the

rays of the earthly sun, it will seem dim or bright according to the eye of the beholder, so does the light of the spirit fill each one according to the measure of his faith. And as the moon in its monthly eclipse disappears from view, by reason of the earth coming between it and the sun, so likewise the Holy Church, when the vices of the flesh stand in the way of the celestial light, can no longer borrow the splendour of His divine light from the Sun of Christ. And in the persecutions it was invariably the love of this life that kept out the light of the Divine Sun.

The stars shall fall, that is, men now shining in the praise of their fellow Christians, even such as are lights to the rest of the world, who possess the word of life, and of whom it was said to Abraham that, *they shall shine as the brightness of the firmament* (Dan. xii. 3). Many esteemed as the Patriarchs shall fall, prophets shall fall, should the sharpness of the persecution mount up, which must come to pass, till the fulness of the merits of the

Church be made up in all her members, and in each one singly; for so the good are proved, and the weak made known. And so oppressive will be the unrest of souls, that upon the brow of many of us, unhappily aware of the multitude of our offences, the dew of the sacred baptism will dry up in fear of the judgment to come; for apostasy dries it, faith distills it.

For the powers of heaven shall be moved: and then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud. And in like manner the coming of the Son of man is longed for, so that by His presence there may be accomplished in the whole world of angels and of men, that which is wrought in single souls, who, with all fitting dispositions, receive Christ. So the Powers of heaven, at the coming of the Lord of salvation, will also attain to an increase of grace; for He is the Lord of the Powers as well, and they will tremble at this appearance among them of the fulness of the glory of the divinity. Then too the Powers that *proclaim the glory of God* (Ps. xviii) shall also tremble before this fuller revealing of His glory, as they gaze on Christ.

David has told us in what manner these Powers are moved, saying: *Come ye to Him, and be enlightened* (Ps. xxxiii. 6); Paul also tells how we may see Christ: *for when they shall be converted to the Lord, a veil shall be taken away, and you will behold Christ* (II Cor. iii. 16). You will behold Him in the clouds. Not that I believe that Christ will come in lowering mist, or in the chill rain torrent, for when they appear, they cloak the sky in gloomy darkness. How then shall He set His Tabernacle in the sun

(Ps. xviii. 6), if His coming be in the rain clouds?

But there are clouds which serve, as is fitting, to veil the splendour of the divine mystery. There are clouds which moisten with the dew of spiritual refreshment. Consider the cloud in the Old Testament: *He spoke to them, it says, in the pillar of the cloud* (Ps. xcvi. 7). He spoke indeed through Moses, and by the mouth of Josue, who bade the sun stand still that he might have the light of the lengthened day. So Moses and Josue were clouds. And observe also that the Holy Ones are clouds, *who fly as clouds and as doves to their windows* (Is. lx. 8). Above me, like clouds, are Isaias and Ezechiel, of whom the former has shown me, through the Cherubim and Seraphim, the holiness of the Divine Trinity. The Prophets all are clouds; in these clouds Christ came. He came in a cloud in the Canticle, serene and lovely, refulgent with the joy of the Bridegroom (Cant. iii. 11). He came and *in a swift cloud*, becoming Incarnate through the Virgin, for the prophet saw Him come as a cloud from the east (Is. xix. 1). And rightly did he call Him a swift cloud Whom no stain of earth weighed down. Consider the cloud in which the Holy Spirit descended, and from wherein the power of the Most High shadowed forth (Lk. i. 35).

When therefore Christ shall appear in the clouds, the tribes of the earth shall mourn; for there is a certain number of offences, a certain series of sins against God, which will suddenly be interrupted by the advent of Christ.

Behold the fig tree, and all the trees: when they now shoot forth their fruit,

you know that summer is nigh. The narratives of the Evangelists, each in his own manner, seem to run together into a single current of meaning. While Matthew has spoken of a single fig tree and of *when the branch thereof is tender*, Luke speaks of *all the trees*. When indeed the fruit is green on all the trees, and the fig tree branch is likewise in bloom, as when every tongue doth confess the Lord, and confessing also is the people of Israel, we are to hope for the Lord's Coming, in which as in summer time the fruits of the Resurrection shall be gathered in; or, when the son of iniquity, as a vain and empty boast, shall have put on as a garland the leaves of the Synagogic branch, we must then see that the judgment is approaching: for the Lord is

hastening to reward faith, and to make an end of wrong doing.

The fig tree has therefore a two-fold meaning, either as meaning, when the hard fruit grows tender, or when sin abounds. For by the faith of those who believe, that which withered shall blossom; and on account of their offences, sinners shall grow boastful. In the one is the fruitfulness of faith, in the other the wantonness of apostasy. The husbandry of the dresser of the vineyard promises me fruit of the fig tree; nor must we lose hope if sinners clothe themselves with the leaves of the fig tree, as with a garment of deceit, that they may hide their conscience; mistrustful leaves therefore, without fruit. Such garments had they who were cast forth from paradise (Gen. iii. 7).

II. ST EPHRAEM, CONFESSOR AND DOCTOR

*On Patience, the Second Coming, and the Last Judgment*⁴

Shining is the life of the Just, but in what does it shine if not in patience? Love this virtue, O Christian, as the mother of fortitude. For the psalmist admonishes us, saying: *Expect the Lord and keep his way* (Ps. xxxvi. 34). Paul also says, teaching us the way in which we must acquire virtue: *tribulation worketh patience* (Rom. v. 3). Exercising patience you will discover hope, the source of every good: *and hope confoundeth not. Be subject therefore to the Lord, and pray to him*, and you will then find that *he will give thee the requests of thy heart* (Ps. xxxvi. 7, 4). What more blessed than this, to obtain merciful hearing from such a King? Who does not eagerly wish that the ears of his judge shall be accessible and gracious? Thou art a worker of

virtue, O Brother, and Christ has brought thee into His vineyard; therefore *while you have time, do good*.

Hear Paul saying: *For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap* (Gal. vi. 8); sow in the spirit, so that you *shall reap life everlasting*. *For he that soweth in his flesh, he says, of the flesh also shall reap corruption*. Hear the good exhorter reminding us: *sow for yourselves in justice, and reap in the mouth of mercy* (Osee x. 12). Be not then neglectful in striving, setting before your eyes the fruits of hope. Where there are contests, there are rewards. Where there are wars, there also are victories; and where there is warfare, there is likewise a crown. Looking to this end, anoint thyself with patience. Say to thyself at all

times the holy words: *Expect the Lord, do manfully, and let thy heart take courage, and wait thou for the Lord* (Ps. xxvi. 14).

Get ready to go forth to thy work, and gird thyself to cultivate thy field. The field is your present life, and for a hoc take with you the Old together with the New Testament. Put a hedge of thorns about your field and your soil, by prayer and fasting together with instruction. If you are protected by this enclosure, the wild beast shall not invade thee, by which I mean the devil. Tend thy soul after the manner of a beautiful vineyard. And as the guardians of the vineyard strike at the thieves with their fists, and call out to them with warnings, and keep them at a distance with stones, so you cry out in prayer, and shout with the song of psalmody, and put to flight the thieving fox, that is, the devil, of whom the Scripture says: *catch us the little foxes that destroy the vines* (Cant. ii. 15).

Be watchful of thy enemy, lest he pierce your heart with some obstinate and unfitting desire. If he seeks to possess your soul as a field, and places there his unclean thoughts, resist and oppose him with the shield of faith. Put on the helmet of hope. Draw the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. And so armed against the enemy, stand fast, and be not unwatchful in the battle, but show yourself sober and vigilant in all things. For we are not ignorant of his designs. *Rejoice always in the Lord*, as it is written. *Let your modesty be known to all men* (Phil. iv. 4-5). Let the fear of the Lord have place in your heart. But be not a timid soldier, nor a slothful,

lazy workman. Do not reject thy crown. Time is short, but judgment is long.

To what do you look back, O Monk; admonish thy heart, and speak to it with the Holy One and say: *Do manfully, and let thy heart take courage, and wait thou for the Lord*. Imitate David and with one stone prostrate thy adversary. The angels stand beside thee as spectators of thy courage; for *we are made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men* (I Cor. iv. 9). Should they behold you victor in a good work, they will rejoice; and if they behold you overcome, since they cannot endure this, they depart unhappy; but the demons will rejoice over thee.

For thy sword and thy weapon, take hold of the fear of the Lord. For the fear of the Lord is like a two-edged sword, cutting off every wicked desire. Keep therefore ever in thy mind the fear of the Lord, being mindful at all times of that last and dreadful day, when the heavens shall be consumed by the heat of fire, and the earth and all that is upon it shall perish. When the stars shall fall like leaves, the sun and the moon shall be darkened, nor shall they give forth light. When the Son of man shall appear, and shall descend from heaven upon the earth, the Powers of heaven shall be troubled. When the appearance of the Angels, and the sound of their trumpets, shall prevail, then *fire shall burn before Him*, and hastening on, it will consume the earth.

Mighty tempests will rise about Him, and dreadful earthquakes and lightnings such as have never before been seen, nor will be, until that day; so that the very powers of

heaven will be seized with a great trembling.

We, too, my Brothers, in what state shall we be then? What fear and dread shall fall upon us? Recall to mind, Brother, the Israelites in the desert, and how they were unable to endure the dark and obscurity, the sound of trumpets, and the voice of the Lord speaking from the midst of the flames (Ex. xx). And they pleaded that the Voice of the Lord should not come nigh to them. For they were unable to endure it, and what was being done there, though He had not descended in wrath, neither had He spoken directly to them, but rather as though comforting them, He had let them know that God was with them.

What then, dearest Brethren, if they could not even with this alleviation endure His descent amongst them, when the heavens were not consumed by fire, nor the earth, and all things upon the face of it? And there was no sound of trumpet, such as that future trumpet will make, to awaken all who *from the beginning have slept*. Nor had there then taken place any of these dreadful future events, and yet they could not endure it.

But what shall we do, I ask you, when God will come down in anger, and dread wrath, and sit on the Throne of His Glory, and summon to Him all the earth, *from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof*, and all the ends of the earth, so that He may judge His people, and render to each according to his works? Oh, Woe! Woe! What kind of people shall we be then? In what state of mind shall we be, when naked and fearful we shall appear there, delivered to that dread

tribunal? Woe! Woe! Woe is me! Where now is the pride of the flesh? Where now is vain and useless beauty? Where, all human delight? Where then, shameless and impudent boldness? Where the delight of sin, sordid and unclean? What then of those who wallow in the wickedness of lust, *of that which is filthy?* (Rom. i. 27.) Where then will they be who worship (Cybele) with drum and wine and dance, but the works of the Lord they have not considered? What then of those who have passed their lives in sloth and disorder? Where then will be the enticements of pleasure? All these things shall have passed away, and like a little cloud shall have been dissolved.

Where then shall avarice be, the desire of earthly possessions, from which rises up hardness of heart? Where the monstrous pride that disposes all things, and thinks to itself that it alone exists? Where now the vain and fleeting success and glory of men? Where then human might? Where now is the Tyrant? Where the King? Where the Prince? Where the Leader? Where the Magistrate? Where are they who revelled in luxury, who glorified in the multitude of their riches, and despised God? In that moment, look up; they shall be struck dumb, they shall be utterly confused and shaken. *Fear will seize them; their pains as of a woman in labour* (Osee xiii. 13; Ps. xlvii. 8). *With a vehement wind thou shalt break them in pieces.*

Where then will be the wisdom of the wise? Where all their vain cleverness? Woe! Woe! they are terrified; *and they were troubled and reeled like a drunken man; and all their wisdom was swallowed up* (Ps. cvi.

27). Where now the learned? Where the scribe? Where the recruiting officer of this foolish world? My Brother, what shall we be then, and in what state of soul, as we render an account of all things, big and little, that we have done, even to the least; for even for an idle word we shall render account to the Just Judge? What must we do, that in that hour we may find mercy before Him?

And with what joy shall we be filled, if we are directed to the right hand of the King? What must we be like when the Just embrace us there? When, I repeat, they shall embrace thee there, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Noah, Job, Daniel, the Holy Prophets, the Apostles, the Martyrs, who all were pleasing to God in the days of the flesh? And whomsoever you have heard of, and whose life you have admired, and whom you now wish to look upon, they will come to thee, and embrace thee, rejoicing in thy salvation. What manner of men must we then be? Of what kind shall be that unspeakable delight which we are to receive, when the king shall with joyfulness say to those who will be on His right hand: *Come ye blessed of my father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world* (Mt. xxiii).

Then, my Brother, then will you receive the kingdom of beauty, the crown of all your desires, from the Hand of the Lord, and reign with Christ for ever. Then you will receive for your inheritance the gifts, *which God has promised to those who love and serve him* (Jas. i. 2). From thenceforward you will be secure, no longer filled with anxiety. Be mindful, my Brother,

of what kind of a person it must be, to whom it will be given to reign with Christ in heaven. Reflect upon what it means to dwell for ever in the light of His Countenance, to possess the source of all light. *For then you shall no more have the sun for thy light by day, neither shall the brightness of the moon enlighten thee* (Is. lx. 19), but Christ will be thy unfailing Light, and God thy glory. Behold, my Brother, what glory He has laid up for those who fear Him, observing His commandments.

Then think upon the end of sinners as they are led before that tremendous tribunal. What terror will lay hold of them in the presence of that just Judge, having now no way to escape His presence? What shame will seize them as they are turned towards the left hand of the King? What dread gloom shall fall upon them, *when in His anger He shall speak to them, and trouble them in His rage, saying: Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels?* (Mt. xxv. 41.)

Alas! Alas! with what torment and oppression of spirit shall they be afflicted, when that cry of woe shall rise up and all have heard it: *The wicked shall be turned into hell, all the nations that forget God* (Ps. ix. 18). Alas! Alas! what cries and groans they will give forth, as they are being led away to be tormented bitterly forever?

Alas! Of what kind is that place of wailing and of gnashing of teeth that is called Tartarus, at which even Satan shudders? O Woe! What kind of place is it, where the unsleeping worm dieth not? What dread misery to be sent into outer darkness? Of what kind are the

angels placed over these torments, who, pitiless and frightful, punish by casting in there, while at the same time they reproach most grievously? Then shall those already in the midst of the torments cry out with pleading voices, and there will be no one to speak for them to the Lord, and they shall not be heard. Then they will learn that the things which happened to them in this life were as nothing; and those that here seemed sweet, were more bitter than gall and worm-wood.

Where then shall be the pleasure falsely named of sin? Since there is no other joy than to fear the Lord and love Him, in this alone is there happiness. This indeed fills the soul *as with marrow and fatness*. Then they shall curse themselves and the evil they have done. Then they will confess that the judgment of God is just, and say: We used to hear of these things, but we would not cease from evil-doing. But then it will avail nothing thus to speak of the past.

Woe! Woe is me! Crush me with these unspeakable offences; for I have sinned above the number of the sands of the sea, and I am stooped with them as with many iron chains. I do not dare to raise

my eyes to the glory of heaven. To whom then shall I turn but to Thee, Most Kind, Most Merciful? *Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy; and according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my iniquities. Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sins. For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me. To Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee (Ps. 1).*

Since therefore I have sinned, to Thee do I come because of Thy great mercy. I have provoked Thee to wrath, and because of Thy clemency to Thee do I fly. I have spurned Thee, yet because of Thy supreme goodness and kindness to Thee do I return; and beseeching Thee I cry: *Turn away Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities, for Thy name's sake alone. I have nothing I may offer Thee; no good work, nor a clean heart. Relying solely on Thy mercies, I cast myself upon them, that Thou may create a clean heart in me, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit lest I speedily fall back into sin. From this day I shall serve Thee, in holiness and justice all the days of my life.* Therefore, let all the Powers of heaven praise Thee. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Majesty, for ever and ever. Amen

III. ST LEO, POPE AND DOCTOR

On the Fast of the Tenth Month and on Almsgiving⁵

Synopsis:

- I. Abstinence prepares the way for the Lord, and raises the mind to heavenly things.
- II. Why the Ember Day Fasts were instituted; to which must be joined fast from the vices.
- III. On the worship of God and the use of temporal things The twofold fast.

Chapter I. When the Saviour was instructing His Disciples concerning the coming of the Kingdom of God, and on the end of the world and of time, and in His Apostles He was teaching His whole church, He said: *Take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life* (Lk. xxi. 34). And this command we know, dearest Brethren, is directed particularly to us to whom that day of warning, though hidden from us, is now without doubt near at hand.

For whose coming let every man make ready, lest it overtake him at a time when he is either given over to the flesh, or immersed in earthly cares. For it is made clear to us, my dearest Brethren, from the experience of our daily life, that by excess in drinking the vision of the mind is dimmed, and by excess in eating the vigour of the heart is brought down: so that the delights of appetite are hurtful to our bodily health, unless a rule of temperance offers resistance to temptation, and withdraws from our pleasure that which would afflict us.

Although it be true that the flesh without the spirit may desire nothing, and from it receives the power of feeling, whence in turn it derives the power of movement, yet is it the duty of the soul to deny certain things to the substance that is subject to it, and by its own inward decision, restrain the outward senses from the things that disagree with them, so that being frequently set free from bodily desires, it can give itself at leisure to divine wisdom, within the inner court of the mind, where, all sound of earthly strife being stilled, it may take its delight in holy meditation,

and in joys that have no end.

And though it is difficult to remain continually in this manner of life, yet not infrequently may we take it unto us, that we may more and more become occupied with spiritual rather than carnal things, so that giving more and more time to the *better things*, even our earthly actions may be transformed into unfading riches.

Chapter II. The profitableness of this manner of living, dearest Brethren, is confirmed in the ecclesiastical fasts, which under the direction of the Holy Spirit are so distributed throughout the course of the year, that the law of abstinence is recalled to us in every season. Accordingly, we celebrate the fast of the season of spring during Lent, that of summer in Pentecost, that of autumn in the seventh month, and that of winter in this which is the tenth month; perceiving in this that nothing is exempt from the divine commandments, and that all the elements serve through the word of God for our instruction, so that by the very turns of the earth itself, as by the four Gospels, we learn both that which we are to proclaim and what we are to do.

For the prophet says: *The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands: day to day uttereth speech, and night to night sheweth knowledge* (Ps. xviii. 1-2). What is there through which Truth speaks not? His words are heard in the daytime, and the sounds of the Selfsame are listened to in the night, and the beauty of all that was made by the sole handicraft of the One God ceases not to make known its mean-

ing to the ears of our heart, so that the invisible things of God are clearly seen by the things that are made (Rom. i. 20), to the end that we may serve, not creatures, but the Creator of all things.

Since, therefore, every vice is defeated by continence, and whatsoever avarice thirsts for, and whatsoever pride seeks in earthly honours, and whatsoever sensuality desires, is overcome by the power of this virtue, who is it that does not see what safeguards are given us by fasting, in which it is implicitly laid upon us that we abstain not alone from food, but from all carnal desires? Otherwise, it would be profitless to suffer hunger, and not to put away evil dispositions; to afflict ourselves by going without food, and at the same time not to turn away from evil desire. It is an unspiritual fast, not a spiritual one, where a man mortifies the body only, and remains fast in the delights that are more harmful to him than all delicacies.

What gain is it to the soul to act outwardly as mistress, and inwardly to be a captive; to command obedience of its members, and forfeit the right to its own freedom? And so for the most part she fittingly has to put up with a rebellious servant, who fails in due obedience to her Lord. While the body therefore goes without food, let the soul abstain from the vices; and let it measure the value of earthly desires and thoughts by the Law of its King.

Chapter III. Let it remember that it owes its first love to God, and the second to its neighbour, and all its affections must be governed by this rule, so that it departs neither from the service of the Lord, nor from

what profits our fellow servant. But how is the Lord served unless that which pleases Him, is pleasing also to us; and that our affection be never withdrawn from His Will? For if we will that which He wills, our weakness draws strength from Him, from Whom we have received the power to will. *For it is God, says the Apostle, who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will* (Phil. ii. 13).

Accordingly, a man will neither be puffed up through pride, nor cast down by despair, if he uses the good things divinely bestowed on him, to the glory of the Giver; withholding his desires from the things which he knows will hurt him. And so he that would preserve himself from the wickedness of envy, from the corruption of sensuality, from the unrest of anger, from the desire of revenge, will be purified by the sanctifying power of true abstinence, and will taste the joy of imperishable delights, so that by making spiritual use of them, he will learn to change earthly possessions into heavenly, not by storing what he has received, but by multiplying more and more that which he has given.

And so, from the affection of our paternal charity, we counsel Your Love,⁶ that you make fruitful this fast of the tenth month by the generousness of your almsgiving, taking joy in this that the Lord through you doth clothe and feed His poor, to whom He could well have given that which He has bestowed on you; save that in His ineffable mercy He has willed that they shall be justified through patience in their tribulations, you by the works of charity.

Let us fast therefore on the fourth

and sixth day of the week; and on the sabbath we shall celebrate the vigils together with the Blessed Apostle Peter, who will graciously assist our prayers, our fasts, and our

almsgiving, with his own prayers, by the favour of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, liveth and reigneth, world without end. Amen.

IV. ST GREGORY: ON THE GOSPEL⁷

Given to the People in the Basilica of the Holy Apostle Peter (Homily 1)⁷

1. Our Lord and Redeemer, desiring to find us prepared, warns us of the evils that are to accompany the end of the world, so that He may keep us from the love of it. He makes known the disasters that will herald its approaching end, so that should we be unwilling to serve God in times of tranquillity, we may, made fearful by these happenings, at least be anxious concerning the judgment now at hand.

For a little prior to this passage of the holy Gospel which you, my Brethren, have just heard, the Lord forewarned us, saying: *Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be great earthquakes in divers places, and pestilences, and famines (Lk. xxi. 10)*. Then having said certain other things in between, He adds this warning which you have just now heard: *There will be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations, by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves*. From among all these things we now see that some have already come to pass; the others that now fill us with dread are to come in the future.

For we behold nation rising against nation, and their distress prevails upon the earth, more now in these our times than we have read of in history. You are aware how frequently we have heard

from other parts of the world that earthquakes have devastated innumerable cities. Pestilences we suffer without ceasing. Signs in the sun and moon and stars we have not yet clearly beheld: but that these are not far off we gather from the alteration of the heavens.

Just as before Italy was given over to be smitten by the heathen sword, we beheld fiery hosts in the sky, and saw him⁸ glittering there who was afterwards to shed the blood of humanity. Extraordinary confusion of the waves has not yet risen. But since much that was foretold has happened, we cannot doubt that the events which remain shall come in time, for the witness of what has been fulfilled is the pledge of that which is to follow.

2. We tell you these things, dearest Brethren, in order that your souls may awaken to an eagerness for security, and lest you become torpid in a security that is false, and become lax through ignorance of Christian truth, but rather that you may become solicitous, and that anxiety may strengthen you in doing good, reflecting on this which the voice of the Redeemer added: *Men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world. For the powers of the heavens shall be moved*.

Whom else does the Lord call by the name of Powers of heaven un-

less the Angels, the Archangels, the Thrones, Dominations, Principalities, and Powers, who at the Coming of the Just Judge will then appear visibly to our eyes, to the end that they may sternly exact an account of that which the Invisible Lawgiver now patiently suffers? Whereto is added: *And then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with great power and majesty;* as though He were openly to say: they shall see Him come in power and majesty to Whom, Present in lowliness, they turned a deaf ear, and so the more sharply will they then feel His severity, the more they now refuse to humble their hearts before His patience.

3. Since these words were directed at the reprobate, He then turns to speak words of comfort to the elect. For He says: *When these things come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand.* It is as if the Truth openly warns His Elect by saying: when the evils of this world mount up, when dread of the judgment is shown even by the trembling powers, lift up your heads, that is, be joyful in your hearts, because the world, of which you are not friends, is drawing to its end; the redemption you have been seeking is coming close. In Scripture the head is often used for the soul, because as the members are ruled by the head, so thoughts are governed by the soul. To lift up your heads therefore means to raise the heart to the joys of the heavenly fatherland.

They, therefore, who love God, are bidden to be glad, and to rejoice, because of the end of the world; since soon they will meet Him Whom they love, and that is

passing away which they have never loved. Far be it then from any of the faithful who desire to see God that they should grieve over the stricken world, which we must know will end in these catastrophes. For it is written: *Whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God* (Jas. iv. 4). Who therefore does not rejoice at the approaching end of the world, testifies that he is its friend, and by this he is revealed as an enemy of God.

But let this be far from the faithful, far from the hearts of those who believe through their faith that there is another life, and who love it in very deed. Let them grieve over the ruin of the world who have planted the roots of their hearts deep in the love of it, who neither look for the life to come, nor are even aware that it is. But we who have learned of the joys of our heavenly home must hasten to it as speedily as we may. We should desire to go there with all haste, and to arrive by the shortest way. And with what miseries does not the world urge us forward? What sorrow, what misfortune is there, that does not press upon us? What is this mortal life but a way? And what folly would it be, let you carefully consider, to be weary with the fatigue of the way, and yet not eager to finish the journey!

That the world is to be trodden on, and despised, Our Redeemer then teaches us, by a timely similitude: *Behold the fig tree and all the trees: when they now shoot forth their fruit, you know that summer is nigh. So you also when you shall see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is at hand.* This is as if he were openly to say: as from

the fruit on the trees you know that summer is near, so from the ruin of the world you may know that the kingdom of God is likewise near. From which it may be truly gathered that the fruit of the world is ruin. To this end it arises, that it may fall. To this end it germinates, that whatever it has brought forth from seed will be consumed in disaster. But happily is the Kingdom of God compared to summer, because then the clouds of our sadness will pass away, and the days, of our life shall be resplendent in the glory of the eternal Sun.

4. All this is confirmed under a mighty pledge, when the sentence is added in which He says: *Amen, I say to you, this generation shall not pass away, till all things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass.* Nothing of this world is more durable than the heavens and the earth, and nothing in the order of nature passes away more quickly than speech. Words, as long as they are incomplete, are not yet words. Once completed, they cease utterly to be; because they cannot be perfected save in their own passing away. Therefore He says: *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass.* As if he were openly to say: all that seems to you enduring and unchangeable, is not enduring and without change in eternity. And everything of mine that seems to pass away, is enduring and without change: because my speech, that passes away, utters thoughts (*sententiae manentes*) which endure for ever.

5. See, my Brethren, already we begin to perceive something of

that of which we have been hearing. The world is oppressed by new and ever-increasing miseries. How many survive of the innumerable multitude of men you may see, yet each day new scourges beset them, sudden disasters fall on them, new and unheard of disasters arise. Just as the body in youth is vigorous, the heart strong and steady, the shoulders upright, and the lungs vigorous, but in old age the figure is no longer upright, the shrunken neck is bowed, the chest labours with frequent sighs, strength fails us, and the speaker is impeded by a faltering breath. Although feebleness is yet absent, yet infirmity in our bodily senses is now our normal state of health. So in its early years, the world flourished as in its pristine strength, vigorous to propagate the offspring of mankind, blooming in the health of its bodies, fat with the richness of life. Now it is falling into its own old age, and, as if near to death, is oppressed with growing miseries.

Do not then, my Brethren, love that which you know cannot endure. Keep before your minds the apostolic counsels wherein we are admonished: *Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him* (I Jn. ii. 15). The day before yesterday, Brethren, you heard that an ancient plantation was uprooted by a sudden storm, that houses were destroyed, churches razed to their foundations. How many were there, safe and well on the previous evening, who believed that in the morning they would fulfil some task, yet that very night were they of a sudden overtaken, caught in the trap of this disaster?

6. But we must carefully keep in mind that in the doing of these things it is the Invisible Judge that moves the breath of the faintest breeze, that awakens the storm from even one small cloud, or razes the foundations of so many buildings. But what shall happen when the Judge shall visibly appear, and when His anger burns against the wicked, if we cannot now endure His wrath when he inflicts upon us the least tempest? Before the face of His wrath what flesh shall stand, if He it is that moves the wind, and shakes the earth, incites the storms, and lays low so many buildings? Paul reflecting on this severity of the Judge to come, says to us: *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (Heb. x. 31). The psalmist gives voice to the same reflection: *God shall come openly, Our God, He shall not be silent, and round about shall be a mighty tempest* (Ps. xlix. 3). Tempest and fire shall accompany the severity of this justice, because the tempest shall search out those whom the fire will burn.

Beloved Brethren, keep that day before your eyes, and then whatsoever may seem burthensome will become light in comparison. Of that day is it said by the mouth of the prophet: *The great day of the Lord is near, it is near and exceeding swift; the voice of the day of the Lord*

is bitter, the mighty man shall there meet with tribulation. That day is a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress, a day of calamity and misery, a day of darkness and obscurity, a day of clouds and whirlwinds, a day of trumpet and alarm (Soph. i. 14-16). Of this day the Lord has spoken by the mouth of the prophet Aggeus (Ag. ii. 22): *Once again and I shall move not alone earth, but heaven.*

Behold, as we have said, He moves the tempest, and the earth cannot endure it. What will it do when He moves the heavens? What can we say of the terrors we now see, except that they are but heralds of the wrath to come? And let us keep in mind that these present afflictions are as far below the last tribulations, as is the person of the herald below the majesty of the judge he precedes. Reflect with all your mind upon this day, my dearest Brethren. Remedy what is now defective in your present life. Amend your ways. Conquer evil temptations by standing firm against them. Repent with tears of the sins you have committed. For the more you make ready against the severity of His justice by serving Him in fear, the more serenely shall you behold the Coming of that Eternal Judge, Who with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, liveth and reigneth, world without end. Amen.

V. ST BERNARD, ABBOT AND DOCTOR

*The Advent of the Lord and Its Six Circumstances*⁹

1. This day, Brethren, we celebrate the beginning of Advent; of which indeed the name, like those of the other solemnities, is truly honoured, and known to all the world, though the reason for the

name is not. For the unhappy children of Adam, turning aside from serious and salutary reflections, give their minds only to that which is perishable and transitory. To whom shall we liken the people

of this generation? Or to whom shall we compare those whom we see cannot be torn from, separated from, earthly and bodily satisfaction? They are indeed like those in danger of death by drowning. For these as you may know cling fast and never let go their hold upon whatsoever may come into their grasp, whatever the thing may be, even if it is something that can be of no help to them, as the roots of grass, and such things. And if others should come to their assistance, seizing hold of them, they not infrequently involve these also in the same peril as themselves; so that aid can now come neither to themselves, not to these others.

And so they perish. In this wide and spacious sea so perish those unhappy ones, who, clutching hard at transitory things, lose what is enduring, of which had they taken fast hold they might have escaped and saved their immortal souls. For it was of Truth, not of wordly vanity it was said: *You shall know it, and it shall make you free* (Jn. viii. 32). You therefore, Brethren, to whom as to little children, God reveals what He has hidden from the wise and the prudent, dwell in earnest reflection upon the things that are truly salutary, and diligently seek out the reason of this season of Advent, asking namely: Who is it that is coming; whence He comes and how He comes; to what purpose; when, and where, does He come? Praiseworthy indeed is this curiosity, and most salutary: nor would the universal Church commemorate so devoutly this present time of Advent unless that there was contained within it some deep significance, some sacred mystery.

2. Before everything else, *consider* with the awed and wondering Apostle, *how great a man this is* (Heb. vii. 4) Who is coming: He is, according to the testimony of Gabriel (Lk. i. 32), *the Son of the Most High*, and, accordingly, co-equal with Him. Nor is it lawful to suppose that the Son of God is less than the Father: we must confess Him equal in majesty, wholly equal in dignity. For who does not know that the sons of princes are princes, and that the sons of kings are kings? Yet why is it that of the Three Persons Whom, in the Most Holy Trinity, we believe, confess and adore, it is not the Father Who comes, nor the Holy Spirit, but the Son? I cannot believe that this is without special cause. But *who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counsellor?* (Rom. xi. 34.) It was not without the most high deliberation of the Trinity that it was decreed that the Son should come. And if we reflect upon the reason of our own exile, we may perhaps discern, at least in part, how supremely fitting it was that we should be redeemed by the Son. For Lucifer, *who didst rise in the morning* (Is. xiv. 12) aspired in his mind *to be like the Most High*, and thought it to be but a matter of *violence to be equal to God*, which is the prerogative of the Son; but being cast headlong down he was ruined: for the Father hath a zeal for the Son, and here He appears to make known by deed, that *vengeance is Mine, I will repay* (Rom. xii. 19). Then suddenly, *I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven* (Lk. x. 18).

In what then do you pride yourself, you who are but dust and ashes? If God spared not the pride-

ful angels, how much the less shall He spare thee, who art but corruption and a worm? He did nothing, he wrought nothing. He but *said in his heart*, and, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, he was cast down for ever; because, according to the Evangelist, *he stood not in truth* (Jn. viii. 44).

3. Flee from pride, my Brethren: fly, I beseech you, from all pride. *Pride is the beginning of every sin* (Ecclus. x. 15); pride it was that so speedily thrust even Lucifer himself into eternal night, though he had shone more brightly than all the stars! Pride it was that transformed into a demon, not simply an angel, but the first of all the angels. And, forthwith, through jealous hate, he brought forth in man the iniquity he had conceived in his own heart, deluding him that tasting the forbidden tree he would become as God, knowing good and evil (Gen. iii. 5).

What is it that you promise, wretch: what is it that you offer, since it is only the Son of the Most High that has the Key of Wisdom; nay more, He is Himself *the Key of David*; *He that openeth and no man shutteth* (Apoc. iii. 7)? In Him *lie hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (Col. ii. 3). Will you then attempt to seize these by treachery, to keep yourself superior to man? You will see that He is in truth, as the Lord hath said, *a liar and the father thereof* (Jn. viii. 44). For he was a liar when he said: *I will be like the Most High* (Is. xiv. 14), and the father of liars, since he injected into man also the poisoned seeds of falsehood, saying: *You shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil* (Gen. iii. 5).

You also, O Man, *if thou didst see a thief thou didst run with him* (Ps. ilix. 18). You have heard what was read this night from the prophet Isaiah; the Lord saying: *Thy princes are faithless*, or as another translation has it: *disobedient, companions of thieves* (Is. i. 23).

4. Our princes, Adam and Eve, the well spring of our race, were in truth disobedient, and the associates of thieves; who attempted through the seduction of the serpent, or rather, of the devil, using the instrument of a serpent, to take what belonged to the Son of God. Nor did the Father let pass unnoticed this injury to His Son, *for the Father loveth the Son* (Jn. v. 20), but forthwith visited on man due punishment, laying upon him the Hand of His Justice. And in Adam we have all sinned, and in him have received sentence of damnation.

What then does the Son do, beholding thus the zeal of the Father for Him, not sparing any one of His creatures? Behold, He says, through Me the Father has lost His creatures. The first of the angels hath desired My Throne; now he has power over those who trusted in him. But the zeal of My Father has punished him; he is stricken, together with all who belong to him, with a wound that heals not, with tormenting chastisements. Man too has sought to possess himself of the knowledge that is Mine only. Neither has the Father spared him, nor turned away His eye.

But *doth God care for oxen?* (1 Cor. ix. 9.) Only two among His creatures has He ennobled by making them sharers of the light of His reason, capable of joy eternal, the angel, namely, and man. But

behold! because of Me He has lost many angels, and all of mankind. Therefore, that they may know that I also love the Father, through Me shall He receive back what, through Me, He is seen to have lost. *Take me up and cast Me into the sea*, said Jonah, *for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you* (Jonah i. 12). All these now look upon Me with envy. *Behold I shall come*, and I shall so reveal Myself to them, that whosoever shall be envious of Me, whosoever shall eagerly desire to become like unto Me, his emulation shall be accounted to him unto justice.

5. I knew that the rebel angels were changed through malice and wickedness, that neither did they sin through ignorance or infirmity, and so, unwilling to repent, they must perish. For the love of the Father and *the honour of the King loveth judgment* (Ps. xciv. 4). Then did He create men, and, in the beginning, that they might take the place of those who were lost, and rebuild again the City of Jerusalem; for He knew that to the fallen angels there remained no way of return. Truly well He knew *the pride of Moab, that he is exceedingly proud* (Is. xvi. 6): and his pride did not admit of the remedy of repentance, nor, through it, of pardon. But in the place of sinful man He made no other creature, showing by this fact that man was yet to be restored; for he whom the malice of one had betrayed, the charity of Another would redeem.

So, Lord, I beseech Thee: *be pleased to deliver me* (Ps. xxxix. 14) *for I am weak* (Ps. vi. 3): *for I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews and here without any fault*

was cast into the dungeon (Gen. xl. 15), Not that I am wholly innocent, but compared with him that seduced me, I am in a certain measure innocent. Falsehood persuaded me, Lord. Let Truth come that falsehood may be laid bare; that I may know the Truth; and the Truth will set me free; yet only if I renounce the uncovered falsehood and cling to the Truth I know. Otherwise the temptation will not be human, nor will the sin be human, but diabolical impenitence. For to continue in evil is in the character of the devil, and they deserve to perish with him who following his example, remain stubborn in iniquity.

6. Behold, Brethren, you have already heard Who it is that comes. Consider now whence He comes and whither He goes? He comes from the Heart of God the Father, and into the womb of the Virgin Mary; He comes from the sublimity of heaven to the lower parts of the earth. What then? Are we who are upon the earth not to be changed? Yes; if He abides here. For where is there good without Him? Or where is it evil, when He is there? *For what have I in heaven? And besides thee what do I desire upon earth? Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever* (Ps. lxxii. 25). *For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for thou art with me* (Ps. xxii. 4).

Now, as I behold, He has descended upon the earth, and descended also into hell itself; yet not as one bound there, but as one *free among the dead* (Ps. lxxxvii. 6), and as a *light which shineth in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

Hence thou wilt not leave His soul in hell, nor wilt Thou let His holy Body taste corruption upon the earth (Ps. xv. 10). For Christ *who has descended, is the same also that ascended above all the heaven, that He might fill all things* (Eph. iv. 9); of whom it was written: *who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil* (Acts x. 38). And elsewhere: *He hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way: His going out is from the end of Heaven, and his circuit even to the end thereof* (Ps. xviii. 6). Rightly then does the Apostle cry out, saying: *Seek the things that are above: where Christ is sitting at the Right Hand of the Father* (Col. iii. 1). In vain would He urge us to lift up our hearts, unless He could also teach us that the Author of our salvation was set on high.

But let us see what follows. For though the matter is abundant, and indeed abounding, the shortness of time does not permit of a lengthy sermon. To those who so meditate upon Who it is that comes, His great and ineffable Majesty becomes revealed. To those who look upwards to discern whence He comes, a great way is laid open to the eyes, according to the testimony of him on whom the spirit of prophecy descended: *Behold, he says, the name of the Lord cometh from afar* (Is. xxx. 27). And then to those who consider whither He goes, there is revealed an incomparable and wholly inconceivable dignity, which has deigned, from such great glory, to descend to the ignominy of this prison.

7. Who can still doubt that there is some great cause why such wondrous majesty has deigned to come down from such dignity, to

an abode so unworthy of it? Plainly there is some great reason, because the mercy revealed is great, great the compassion, and great the charity. To what end then must we believe that He came? This reflexion, in accordance with the order we have proposed to ourselves, we shall now consider.

There is little need to dwell long upon it, since both His Words and His Works proclaim the reason of His Coming: to find the hundredth sheep, that had strayed, He has hastened down from the mountains; and that *the mercies of the Lord, might, more clearly, give glory to Him; and His wonderful works to the children of men* (Ps. cvi. 8), He came for our sakes. Wondrous dignity of the Lord, Who comes seeking; wonderful the dignity of men, so sought for! And in this if any man should wish to glory, he shall not be foolish; not because he appears to be something, as from himself, but because He that made Him is Mighty. For all riches, all the glory of this world, and all whatsoever in it that is desired, is less than this Might; neither is there anything with which to compare it. *Lord, what is man that thou shouldst magnify him? Or why dost thou set thy heart upon him?* (Ps. vii. 17).

8. But yet I would know what does it mean that He should come to us, and why rather have we not gone to Him. For it is we who were in need, and it is not usual for the rich to come seeking the poor, that is, if they still desire to retain their own superiority. And in truth, Brethren, it was more fitting that we should go to Him, but against this was a twofold barrier, our eyes were dim and groping, and

He *inhabiteth light inaccessible* (I Tim. vi. 16); and, lying paralysed upon our poor beds, we could not ascend to that divine sublimity. And so the Most Benign Saviour, the Physician of our souls, comes down from His Glory, tempering the brightness of His Splendour to our infirm sight. He veiled Himself as it were in a lantern, in that glorious, that most pure and stainless Body which He put on; this Body that is the swift and shining cloud upon which, as the Prophet had foretold, *the Lord would ascend* that He might *enter into Egypt* (Is. xix. 1).

9. We must now enquire as to the time in which the Saviour came. He came, and this we believe is not unknown to you, not in the beginning of time, nor yet in the centre, but at its end. Neither was this also without design, for Wisdom, in its order, had disposed that when we were most in need He would bring us aid; being mindful of the children of Adam, though they were prone to ingratitude.

Truly was it then towards the evening, and the day now far spent; the sun of justice was low, and its splendour and warmth had almost vanished from the earth. And the light of the knowledge of divine things was low, and, iniquity abounding, the fervour of charity had grown cold. No angel then appeared, no prophet spoke; they were silent, as though overcome by despondency, because of the hardness and obstinacy of men. *Then said I, said the Son, behold I come* (Ps. xxxix. 8).

And so *while all things were in silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, Thy Almighty Word, O Lord, leaped down from heaven*

(Wisd, xviii. 14). Of the same mystery the Apostle speaks, saying: *but when the fulness of time was come, God sent His Son* (Gal. iv. 4). For the fulness and abundance of things temporal had induced forgetfulness and scarcity of things eternal. In fitting time did Eternity come, when the things of time had begun alone to prevail. For, passing over other proofs, so universal was peace among the nations that at the order of one man a census was taken of *the whole world*.

10. We have dwelt upon the Person of Him who comes, and on the two places, that is, whence He comes and whither He goes. The reason of His Coming, and the time of it, you are now also aware of. But one circumstance remains, namely; the way by which He comes, and this also we must earnestly seek to know, that we may, as is fitting, go out to meet Him. For though He came once visibly in the Flesh upon this earth, to work our redemption, He still comes daily, in the spirit, and *invisibly*, to redeem individual souls; as it is written: *The breath of Our mouth, Christ Lord, is taken in our sins*. And that you may know that this spiritual Coming is an invisible one, He goes on: and *under Thy shadow we shall live among the gentiles* (Lam. iv. 20).

Accordingly, it is but fitting that though the sick man may not travel far to meet this so great Physician, let him at least raise his head, and in some measure give greeting to Him who comes. There is no need for thee, O Man, to travel over the seas; it is not necessary to pierce the clouds, to cross the high Alps; no great way, I repeat, lies before thee

Hasten to meet Thy God within Thy very self: *The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart* (Rom. x. 8). Hasten to have compunction of soul, and confession from thy mouth, so that thou may at least go out from the dung-pit of a soiled conscience; for it is unfitting that the Author of all purity should enter such a place. And these things are said of that Advent whereby He deigns to illuminate with his invisible light the souls of individual men.

11. Let us now happily dwell upon the ways of His *Visible Coming: since his ways are beautiful ways, and all his paths are peaceful* (Prov. iii. 17). Behold, says the Bride, *He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills* (Cant. ii. 8). You see Him coming, O beautiful One, but you see not where he resteth in the midday. For she said: *shew me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where thou liest in the midday* (Cant. i. 6). Resting He feeds the Angels for all eternity, nourishing them with the vision of His eternal and immortal Presence. But know you not, O beautiful One, that thy Vision is become wonderful to thee: *it is high, and you cannot reach to it* (Ps. cxxxviii. 6); but behold He has come forth from His holy place, and He Who, lying down, doth pasture the angels, has begun and will restore you to health, and in His Coming we shall see Him Who, while resting and feeding His angels, could not before be seen.

Behold He cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills. In place of mountains and hills understand patriarchs and prophets, and as He came leaping and skip-

ping, read in the book of the generation of Jesus: *Abraham begot Isaac: and Isaac begot Jacob* and so on. From these mountains came forth, as you will find, the Root of Jesse, whence, according to the prophet, *there came forth a Rod, and thence a flower shall rise up, upon which the sevenfold Spirit of the Lord shall rest* (Is. xi. 1).

And revealing this more plainly in another place, the same prophet says: *Behind a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us* (Mt. i. 23). For He whom he first refers to as a flower, the same he here calls Emmanuel; and that which he before calls a rod, (virga) he here speaks of as the Virgin.¹⁰

From this I believe it to be evident who is the Rod coming forth from the Root of Jesse, and Who is the Flower upon which the Holy Spirit rests: that the Mother of God is this Rod, and her Son Jesus the Flower. A Flower accordingly is the Son of the Virgin; a flower *white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands* (Cant. v. 10); a flower upon which the angels desire to look (I Pet. i. 12); a Flower whose fragrance restores the dead to life; and as He himself has said, a *Flower of the field*, and not of the garden. For the field flowers without human help, it is by no man sown, unbroken to the spade, nor made rich with soil. So truly has flowered the Womb of the Virgin; so has the inviolate, the unstained, the pure flesh and blood of Mary, as a field, brought forth this flower of eternal beauty; Whose perfection shall see no corruption, Whose glory shall be forever unfading.

O Virgin, Sublime Rod, to what

holy eminence are you come on high? Even to the very Throne, even to the Lord of all Majesty? And what wonder, since to the very depths thou dost send down the roots of thy own humility. O Truly Celestial Blossoming Rod, more precious, more holy, than all the rest! O True Wood of Life, that alone was found worthy to bear the fruit of salvation!

Thou art caught, evil serpent, in the trap of thine own cunning, thy falsity is laid bare. Two things you had charged against your Creator: you had accused Him of falsehood, and of envy. But in either case it is you that is proved the liar. Because as to the first charge, he died to whom you said: *No, you shall not die the death* (Gen. iii. 4). And answer Him now if you can, of what tree, or, of the fruit of what tree, should He be envious, Who refused us not even this chosen branch, and its sublime Fruit? *For he that spared not even his own Son, and how hath He not also, with Him given us all things* (Rom. viii. 32).

You have already comprehended, if I am not mistaken, that the Royal Virgin is Herself the Way through which the Saviour comes, coming forth from her womb *as a bridegroom coming out of his bridechamber*.

Holding fast then to this way, let us strive, Beloved, to ascend through Her to Him, Who through Her has come down to us; to reach by Her aid to His divine forgiveness, Who came by way of Her to take away our woe.

Through thee have we access to Thy Son, O Blessed Discoverer of Grace, Mother of Life, Mother of Salvation! May He through Thee forgive us, Who by Thee was given unto us. May thy blameless integrity plead with Him, that He look not upon our corruption; and let thy humility that so pleases God, obtain the pardon of our pride.

Let thy boundless charity cover the multitude of our sins, and thy glorious fruitfulness bring us an abundance of mercies. Our Lady, Our Mediatrix, present us to Thy Son. Speak for us to Thy Son. Grant, O Most Blessed, through the graces thou hast earned, through the privileges thou hast merited, through the mercy thou hast received, that He Who deigned by means of Thee, to become a Sharer of our infirmity and sorrow, may through thy intercession make us sharers of His Glory and of His Joy, Jesus Christ Thy Son Our Lord, Who is above all God the Blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

¹ Cf. CSEL, 57, Ep. 199, XI 36, 37.

² PL 15, 1814. ³ PL 15, 1814.

⁴ Vossio, St Ephraem I 161. This sermon, and others, edited by Vossio, Cologne 1616, is not given in the restricted edition of Lamy, Malines 1902. Vossio however makes substantial claims for its authenticity.

⁵ PL 54, 185-188, Sermo 19 Sancti Leonis.

⁶ Used in address, among Christians, from early iv cent. GLL 104.

⁷ PL 76, 1077-1081 (Homily I).

⁸ This reference is to the Lombards and their king, who later invaded Rome but withdrew at Gregory's persuasion.

⁹ PL 183, 35-40 (Homily I).

¹⁰ Continued from Sermo II, pars. 4 and 5, 42-43.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

I. ST. HILARY: ON THE GOSPEL

II. ST JEROME: ON THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAS

III. ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM: ON THE GOSPEL

IV. ST PATRICK: THE THREE HABITATIONS

V. ST GREGORY THE GREAT: ON THE GOSPEL

THE GOSPEL OF THE SUNDAY

MATTHEW xi 2-10

At that time: When John had heard in prison the works of Christ: sending two of his disciples he said to him: art thou he that art to come, or look we for another? And Jesus making answer said to them: Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he that shall not be scandalised in me. And when they went their way, Jesus

began to say to the multitudes concerning John: What went you out into the desert to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold they that are clothed in soft garments, are in the houses of kings. But what went you out to see? A prophet? Yea, I tell you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: *Behold I send my angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.*

PARALLEL GOSPEL

LUKE vii. 18-27

And John's disciples told him of all these things. And John called to him two of his disciples, and sent them to Jesus, saying: Art thou he that art to come; or look we for another? And when the men were come unto him, they said: John the Baptist hath sent us to thee, saying: art thou he that art to come;

or look we for another? And in that same hour, he cured many of their diseases, and hurts, and evil spirits: and to many that were blind he gave sight. And answering, he said to them: Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf

hear, the dead rise again, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be scandalised in me. And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak to the multitudes concerning John. What went you out into the desert to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went you out to see? a man

clothed in soft garments? Behold they that are in costly apparel and live delicately, are in the houses of kings. But what went you out to see? A prophet? Yea, I say to you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written: *Behold I send my angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.*

EXPOSITION FROM THE CATENA AUREA

GLOSS: The Evangelist had previously told how through both signs and wonders, and by teaching, the Disciples as well as the people were being instructed by Christ. Now he goes on to tell in what manner this instruction came to be imparted to the disciples of John; who appeared to be governed by an attitude of rivalry towards Christ. Accordingly, he says: *Now when John heard in prison the works of Christ: sending two of his disciples he said to Him: art thou he that art to come, or look we for another?*

GREGORY, *Homily 6 in Evang*: Here we have to ask ourselves this question: John, a prophet, and more than a prophet, who had himself pointed out the Lord to his own disciples, as He came to John to be baptized, and the Baptist had said: *Behold the lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sins of the world;* Why now from his prison does he send these two disciples to ask: *art thou he that art to come or look we for another?* As if he did not know Him Whom he had himself proclaimed by prophesying concerning Him, by baptizing Him, by pointing Him out to others?

AMBROSE, in *Luke Ch. vii*: Some however understand the passage

in this way. John was truly so great a prophet that he could discern the Christ; that he could proclaim the future forgiveness of sins. But though he had acknowledged Him as the Holy Prophet Whom he had believed was to come, nevertheless he had not believed that He was to die. He doubted therefore, not through lack of faith, but through piety. He doubted as Peter doubted when he said: *Lord, be it far from thee, this shall not be unto thee* (Mt. xvi. 22).

CHRYSOSTOM, *Hom. 37 in Matth*: But this interpretation is not reasonable. John was not ignorant on this point. For he had testified from the beginning regarding it, saying: *Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sins of the world.* By calling Him lamb, he proclaimed the Cross. For it was only by the Cross that he took away the sins of the world. How is he greater than a prophet, if he knows not what the prophets knew? For *Isaias* says: *As a lamb he was led to the slaughter* (Is. liii. 7).

GREGORY, *Hom. 7 in Evang*: The question may be answered in another way, if the time of the action be considered. By the Jordan John had confessed Him to be the

Redeemer of the world. Now from his prison he sends to ask if He is to come. He doubts not that He is the Saviour of the world, but he seeks to know if He Who, of His own will, came into this world, will also of His own will descend into hell?

JEROME: Hence he does not say: Art thou He Who hast come? But, *art thou he that art to come?* And the meaning is: send word to me, as I am about to descend into hell, whether I am to announce Thee there, or will you send another to fulfil this mission?

CHRYSOSTOM as above: but how can this interpretation be justified? John did not say: art thou the one that is about to descend into hell, but simply, *art thou he that art to come?* It is even more absurd that he should speak in this manner for the added reason, that descending into hell he might preach Him there. For the present life is the time of grace; after death there is but judgment and justice. Hence there was no need for a Precursor there. It would be different if the unbelieving could believe after death, and then be saved. Then no one at any time would be lost, for all would then do penance, and all would adore, *every knee shall bend.*

GLOSS: We must note that Jerome and Gregory did not say that John was so to announce the Coming of Christ in hell, that by his preaching some unbelievers might be converted; but that he might bring to the just, who waited in expectation of the Coming of Christ, some consolation by the tidings of His near approach.

HILARY *Ch. XI in Matth:* It is nevertheless certain that, as Precursor,

he foretold that Christ was to come; as Prophet, he knew that He was already in the midst of men; as Confessor, he had venerated Him before men. Error did not shadow his perfect knowledge. Nor can we believe that the grace of the Holy Spirit was denied him in prison, when the light of that same Power was later to be given to the imprisoned Apostles.

JEROME: He asked, not as one who was ignorant, but as the Saviour asked where they had laid Lazarus: so that those who indicated the place of the sepulchre would be so much the better prepared to believe when they should see the dead rising. So John, soon to be put to death by Herod, sends his disciples to Christ, so that by seeing the signs and wonders wrought by the Master they would believe in Him, and by speaking with Him, would learn for themselves. That John's disciples had a certain feeling of bitterness towards the Lord, because of envy, is apparent from their question on a previous occasion, as when they said: *why do we and the Pharisees fast, and your disciples do not fast?*

CHRYSOSTOM: As long as John was with his disciples, he strove continually to convince them of the truth with regard to the Christ. Now, being about to be put to death, he strove even more earnestly. For he was fearful lest he leave his disciples in an unsettled state of mind, and that they might remain alienated from Christ, towards Whom, from the beginning, he had striven to lead them. If he were simply to say to them: *go, follow Him; for he is greater than me, he*

would not at all have persuaded them. More, by speaking in this way, they would only think that he wished to humble himself, and thus they would have become even more attached to him.

What therefore does he do? He waits till in due time he hears from them, that Christ is working miracles. Neither does he now send all of them, but only two, whom he perhaps knows to be more open to conviction than the rest, so that they themselves might make a straightforward enquiry, and, from what they saw, might learn for themselves how great was the distance between the Baptist and Christ.

HILARY, as above: John therefore was not studying his own ignorance, but that of his disciples. In order that they might learn that he had been preaching none other than this Christ, he sends his disciples that they might behold His works; so that what he had himself taught them, concerning Christ, might now be confirmed by Christ's own signs and wonders.

CHRYSOSTOM, as above: Christ, discerning the purpose of John, did not simply say in reply: *Yes, I am he.* Because by such a reply He would but revive their antipathy. For they would think, though they might not say, that which the Pharisees had already said to Him: *Thou givest testimony of thyself* (Jn. viii. 13). For this reason he made them learn the answer from His miracles, thus giving a reply that was simple and unanswerable. For the testimony of deeds is more credible than that of words. Accordingly, He there and

then cured the lame, the blind, and many others. He did this, not in order to teach John, who already knew, but these disciples, who were still doubtful. Hence the Gospel goes on: *and Jesus making answer said to them: go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them.*

JEROME: What is last mentioned is not the least significant. For the poor understand either the poor in spirit, or, without doubt, the poor of this world. So that in the preaching of the gospel there is no distinction between high and low, rich and poor. This proves the impartiality of the Master, the truthfulness of the Instructor, since He seeks without preference the salvation of each one.

CHRYSOSTOM: Saying: *blessed is he that shall not be scandalised in Me,* He reproaches John's messengers. For they had been scandalised in Him. Without openly making known their doubt, leaving it within their own hearts, He secretly forgives their offence.

HILARY: He makes clear that of which John had already warned them, saying: *blessed is he in whom there was nothing of scandal concerning Himself.* For it was through fear of this, lest they be scandalised, that John had sent his disciples. So that they would learn from Christ Himself. GREGORY *Hom. 6 in Evang.*: The minds of those who had not believed suffered grave scandal in regard to Christ, when after so many miracles they beheld Him dying. Hence

Paul has said: *We preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to the Jews* (I Cor. i. 23). What then does He mean here: *Blessed is he that is not scandalised in me*, unless signifying in clear terms the abjection and lowliness of His own death? It is as if He openly said: "I perform wonders, but I do not refuse also to suffer humiliations. Because in my death I shall go the way of men, men must take care that they do not despise Me in death, though they now honour Me because of these wonders."

HILARY, as above: Mystically, an even fuller understanding is to be had of that which John did here. For as a prophet he prophesied even in the very circumstances of his imprisonment; because in him the Law became silent. The Law had been foretelling of Christ and the forgiveness of sins, and had promised likewise the kingdom of heaven. And John had brought to completion this work of the Law. The Law now silent, imprisoned by the wickedness of men, as it were held in bonds and shut away, so that Christ might not be made known, then sends to look upon the Gospel, so that doubt may be changed to belief in its doctrine, through seeing the works of the Gospel.¹

AMBROSE, on *Luke Ch. 7*: Perhaps these two disciples whom he sent, signify the two peoples; the one believing for the Jews, the other for the Gentiles. CHRYSOSTOM, in *Matth, Hom. 36*: As to John's disciples, his purpose was accomplished. Now satisfied concerning Christ because of the wonders they had seen, they returned whence

they came. But it was also necessary to correct the minds of the people who, from this interrogation by John's disciples, may have been led to erroneous conclusions, being unaware of John's purpose. They might have said among themselves that he who had testified so much concerning Christ, seems to believe differently now, and even doubts if He really is the Christ. Have they quarrelled, that he now speaks in this manner to Jesus? Or has prison changed his mind? Or was that which he proclaimed before but vain and foolish talk?

HILARY, in *Matth. 11*: Lest the words He had just spoken to the disciples be wrongly applied to the Baptist, as though it were he that were scandalised in Christ, the Scripture adds: *And when they, the disciples, went their way, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John.* CHRYSOSTOM: Only when they went their way did He speak, lest He might appear to flatter. Again, in correcting the people, He did not openly refer to their suspicions, but guided their minds towards an explanation of what had been troubling them, and had occasioned their doubts, thus showing them that He knew their hidden thoughts. For He did not say to them as He did to the Pharisees: *Why do you think evil in your hearts* (Mt. ix. 4). For though they had thought evil, it was through ignorance, not malice. And so He did not speak severely to them, but speaking on John's behalf He showed that the Baptist had not fallen away from his first belief. He proves this as well from their own testimony, as by His own words. He proved it, not alone by what

they said, but by what they had done. And so He says: *What went you out into the desert to see?* As if He said: for what reason did you, abandoning the cities, gather together in the wilderness? So great a multitude would not have come and with such eagerness, into the desert, unless expecting to see something great, something wonderful, something more enduring than the arid desert.

GLOSS: They had not at this time gone out into the desert to see John, for he was not then in the desert, but in prison. But our Lord was speaking of the past. Because the people had gone out frequently to the desert to see John while he was in the desert.

CHRYSOSTOM, *Hom. 38 in Matth*: Passing over any other possible defect, He removes from their mind the suspicion of levity the crowd had inwardly entertained concerning John, saying: *a reed shaken by the wind?* GREGORY, *Hom. 6 in Evang*: Which suspicion He disposed of, not by alleging, but by denying. Scarcely does the breath of the breeze touch the reed than it bends the other way. In this the carnal soul is signified, which, as soon as it is touched by inclination or delight, inclines in that direction. *A reed shaken by the wind* John was not, but a man no allurements would turn from his path. As if the Lord should say: JEROME: was it for this you went out into the desert: that you might see a man like a reed in character turned about by every wind, of such changeable mind that he is uncertain now of what he before proclaimed? Or perhaps he is moved by jealousy against Me,

and his preaching was but a following after vain glory that from it he might make profit? But why should he seek wealth? That he might revel in feasting? But his food was locusts and wild honey. Was it that he might dress richly? But his clothing was of camel's hair. And so he adds: *but what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?*

CHRYSOSTOM, *Hom. 38 in Matth*: That John is unlike a fickle reed you have proved by your own eagerness in going out to see him in the desert. No man either can say that John was first constant, then afterwards, giving himself to pleasure, became inconstant. For just as one is by nature irascible, and another becomes so by illness, some are fickle by nature, others become so by giving themselves to wantonness. John was not fickle by nature, for which it was He had said: *what went you out to see, a reed shaken by the wind?* Neither, giving himself to pleasure, had he lost the excellence of virtue which he possessed. That he was no servant of pleasure, his poverty alone, as well as his prison, confirms. Had he wished to be clothed in soft garments he would have dwelt, *not in the desert, but in the houses of kings*. Hence we have: *Behold they who are clothed in soft garments, are in the houses of kings*. JEROME: From this it is indicated to us that austere living and the preaching of the Gospel, must keep away from the palaces of kings, and the houses of luxury-living men.

GREGORY, *Hom. 6 in Evang*: Let no one think that sin can be absent from luxurious living and the love

of precious garments. For if there were no fault in it Our Lord would not have praised John for his austerity, nor Peter have reprov'd women for their craving for precious adornment (I Pet. iii. 3).

AUGUSTINE, *De Doct. Christiana*, 3; 12: Yet in all these things the fault lies, not in the use of things, but in the disordered appetite of the user. Whosoever uses things more sparingly than those among whom he lives, is either temperate, or over-scrupulous. Whosoever uses them so as to exceed the measure of what is usual among goodliving people about him, either wishes to convey some meaning, or is a person without order in his life.

CHRYSOSTOM: Our Lord having vindicated the character of John, from the manner of his life and of his clothing, and from the thronging of people to him, shows also that he was a prophet, and more than a prophet, saying: *what went you out to see? A prophet? I say to you and more than a prophet.*

GREGORY: it is the office of the prophet to foretell future events, not to point them out. John therefore is more than a prophet, because Him of whom He had prophesied, he had also pointed out, [indicating Him to his own disciples]. JEROME: in which he is greater than the other prophets; since to the office of prophet is added the dignity of Baptist, for he had baptised the Lord.

CHRYSOSTOM: Then he shows in what John is greater, saying: *This is he of whom it is written: behold I send my angel before thy face.* JEROME: That He might add to the merits of John, He recalls the testimony of

Malachy (Mal. iii. 1), in which he is foretold as an *angel*. Let us not however infer that John was called an angel by community of nature, but rather from the dignity of his office; he was a *messenger* who announced the Coming of the Lord. GREGORY: That which is called *angelus* in Greek is in Latin *nuntius* or *messenger*. Fittingly, therefore, is he called *angelus* who had come to announce the *Supernal Judge*; so that he may possess in his name the dignity of his office.

CHRYSOSTOM: He reveals, therefore, in what John is greater than the other prophets; in this, namely; that he is near to Christ. And so the Scripture says: *I send before thy face*, that is, before Thee. For those who precede the king's chariot are nobler than the others. In this way John is closer to the presence of Christ. GLOSS.: Other prophets were sent that they might announce the Coming of the Lord; he was sent to prepare His path. Hence it is said: *who shall prepare thy way before thee*, that is, by preaching penance, and by baptising, he prepared the hearts of Christ's hearers.

HILARY: Mystically, the *desert* must be considered as a place empty of the Holy Spirit, in which there is no dwelling place of God. In the *reed* we see a man who is absorbed in the vanity of the world, and in his own empty life. Within he is void of the fruit of truth, having a pleasing exterior, but an empty interior; responsive to the breath of every wind, that is, to every prompting of unclean spirits; never able to take a firm stand, and vain to the marrow of his bones.

By *garments* is mystically signified

the body which the soul as it were puts on, and which grows soft by luxury and wantonness. *Kings* is another name for the fallen angels. For these are the *Powers* of this world, not that they rule the world visibly, but rather the evil men in the world; hence they *lord it over men*. Accordingly, those dressed in luxurious garments are in the houses of kings, means, mystically:

those whose bodies are lax and dissolute, through wantonness, are plainly the habitations of demons. GREGORY: John was not clothed in soft garments, because he did not condone with flattery the lives of those who were living in sin, but rather upbraided them in bitter words, saying: *ye brood of vipers, who hath showed you to flee from the wrath to come?*

I. ST HILARY: ON THE GOSPEL²

1. *Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ: sending two of his disciples, he said to Him. Art thou He that is to come or look we for another?* Did John in his prison not know the Lord? Did so great a prophet know not his God? But as Precursor he had foretold that He was to come; as Prophet he had recognised Him standing in their midst; as Confessor he had venerated Him before men. Did error creep into so profound and varied knowledge? The subsequent testimony of the Lord concerning John does not permit us to think so. Nor can we believe that the light of the Holy Spirit was denied him in prison, when the Light of that same Power was to be given to the imprisoned apostles.

Why John sent to Christ

2. But a clearer understanding is furnished from the things John did, and from the efficacy of the action the grace that was in him is evident. For as Prophet he prophesied by the very circumstances of his imprisonment; because in him the Law became silent. For the Law had foretold Christ, and the forgiveness of sin, and had promised men the kingdom of heaven. John

had continued and brought to a close this purpose of the Law. The Law was now silenced, imprisoned by the wickedness of men, and as it were held in bonds, lest Christ become known, because John has been fettered and imprisoned. The Law therefore sends messengers to behold the works of the Gospel, so that unbelief may contemplate the truth of the faith in the light of these wonders; so that whatever in it (the Law) is frustrated by the violence of sinful men, may be set free by an understanding of the freedom wherewith Christ has made us free (Gal. iv. 31).

In this manner John remedied not his own but his disciples' ignorance. For he had himself proclaimed that Christ was to come unto the forgiveness of sin. But that his disciples might learn that he had preached none other than Christ, he sends them to Him that they may behold His works, so that the works of Christ may confirm his own teaching, and, finally: so that they might look for no other Christ than He to whom the works gave testimony.

The Scandal of the Cross is Foretold

3. And when the Lord had re-

vealed Himself in wonders, namely: in the blind seeing, the lame walking, in lepers being cleansed, the deaf hearing, the dumb speaking, in the dead rising again, and in the preaching of the gospel to the poor, He says: *blessed is he that shall not be scandalised in Me.* Was there anything in what Christ had done which might scandalise John? Far from it. For in the whole course of his mission and teaching he had had nothing to say opposed to Him.

But the force and significance of the preceding sentence must be carefully dwelt on; on that, namely, which is preached to the poor; that is, they who have laid down their lives, who have taken up the cross and followed after, who have become humble in spirit, for these a kingdom is prepared in heaven. Therefore, because this universality of suffering was to be fulfilled in Christ Himself, and because His Cross would become a stumbling-block to many (I Cor. i. 23), He now declares that they are blessed to whom His Cross, His death, and Burial, will offer no trial of faith. So He makes clear that of which already, earlier, John has himself warned them, saying that blessed are they in whom there would be nothing of scandal concerning Himself. For it was through fear of this that John had sent his disciples, so that they might see and hear Christ.

Whom does the reed signify?

4. Lest however this saying should be referred to John, as if something in Christ had scandalised him, *the disciples going away*, Our Lord said to the crowd concerning John: *What went you out to the desert to see; a reed shaken by the wind?*

Mystically, the desert must be considered as a place empty of the Holy Spirit, in which there is no dwelling place of God. The *reed* must be taken as meaning a man such as is wholly absorbed in the glory of this world, and in the emptiness of his own life; within he is without fruit of truth, he has a pleasing exterior, but no interior; responsive to the breath of every wind, that is, to the suggestions of unclean spirits, unable ever to stand firm, and vain to the marrow of his bones. Therefore when He said, *what went you out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind?* this is what He said. Did you go out to see a man who was empty of the knowledge of God, and responsive to the breath of every unclean spirit? For He spoke to them in a spirit of approval rather than reproach; wishing to affirm that they had not seen anything in John that was empty or fickle.

Bodies corrupted by lust are the dwelling places of devils

5. *But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments: behold that they are clothed in soft garments are in the house of kings.* By *garments* are mystically signified the body which the soul as it were puts on, and which grows soft through luxury and wantonness. In *kings* we have a name for the fallen angels. For those are the powers of the world, lording it over men. Therefore, those dressed in luxurious garments are in the house of kings means that those whose bodies are lax and dissolute through wantonness are habitations of the demons, who choose such dwelling-places as being suited to their designs and evil works.

The glory of John

6. *But what went you out to see? A prophet? Yea, and more than a prophet.* The Lord makes plain to all the greatness of John, declaring him to be more than a prophet, because only to him was it given both to foretell the Coming of Christ and to behold Him. How then shall it be believed that he knew not

Christ, who was sent with the power of an angel to make ready for His Coming, and than whom no greater prophet born of woman had arisen; excepting that he is less than Him Who was questioned by the disciples of John, Who was not believed, to Whom not even His works gave testimony. He is greater in the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

II. FROM ST JEROME'S EXPOSITION OF THE PROPHET ISAIAS

There shall come forth a Rod out of the Root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his Root. Isaias xi i. Roman Breviary.³

A Rod shall rise out of Jesse. Up to the beginning of the vision, which Isaias the son of Amos saw, and which was of the burden of Babylon, all this prophecy relates to Christ; the which we propose to explain, part by part, so that the subject treated of, and the discussions upon them, may not confuse the mind of the reader. The Jews interpret the Shoot and the Flower of Jesse as the Lord Himself; namely, that by the Rod is signified His Royal Power, and by the Flower His Beauty.

We however believe that the Holy Virgin Mary is the Rod from the Root of Jesse, to which no enriching plant hath cleaved, and of whom we earlier read: *Behold a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.*

And the Flower is the Lord Our Saviour, Who says in the Canticle of Canticles: *I am the Flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys.*

Upon this Flower then which of a sudden will rise up from the stock and the root of Jesse, through the Virgin Mary, the Spirit of the Lord will rest: because in Him it hath pleased all the fulness of the Godhead to dwell corporeally: and not in part, as in others who were sanctified; but as the Nazarenes read in their Gospel, written in the Hebrew tongue: *The whole fountain of the Holy Spirit shall come down upon Him. Now the Lord is a spirit. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

III. ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM: ON THE GOSPEL⁴

i. *Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ . . .* Luke tells us that his own disciples came and told John of the miracles, and that he sent them (Lk. vii. 18, 19). This creates no contradiction, but it does provide us with a reflection, namely; that they seemed inflamed with envy against Jesus. What

follows is to be carefully considered. What means this saying: *Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another?* For he who had known the Lord before these signs and wonders, who had been taught by the Holy Spirit, who had received knowledge of Him from the Voice of the Father, who had proclaimed Him

before all men, now sends to Him, that he may learn whether it is He or not?

And if you know not whether this is He, how can you deem yourself worthy of belief, giving testimony of things you know not? For he who gives testimony ought first be worthy of belief. Did you not say: The latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loose? (Lk. iii. 16) Did you not say: *And I knew him not, but He who sent me to baptize with water, said to me: He upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending He it is who baptizeth with the Holy Ghost* (Jn. i. 33). Have you not seen the Spirit in the form of a dove? Have you not heard the Voice? Did you not stay Him, saying: *I ought to be baptized by thee, and comest thou to me?* (Mt. iii. 14) Did you not say to your disciples: *He must increase, but I must decrease?* (Jn. iii. 30) Did you not teach all the people, that *He would baptize in water and the Holy Spirit* (Lk. iii. 16)? And that he was the *Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world* (Jn. i. 29)? Did you not even before these signs and wonders preach Him to all men? How then, when He is known to all, when His fame flies in every direction, after He has raised the dead, put evil spirits to flight, and manifested such signs of power, do you send to ask this concerning Him? What then has happened? Were all these testimonies false, and but fables and old wives' tales?

Who of sound mind would utter such things? Not certainly of John, I say, *who leaped in the womb of his mother* (Lk. i. 41); who, unborn, had yet proclaimed Him; the dweller in the desert, of the angelic life. But even if he were one of the

lowest of men, he could not be doubtful after such testimony, his own and that of others. And so it is plain that he did not send as one in doubt; nor inquire as one in ignorance. Neither may any one say that he did know, but that he had become timid through prison. For he did not expect to be freed from prison, nor if he did would he have betrayed the truth; prepared as he was again and again to die. For unless he were ready to die, he would not have shown such strength of soul before a people who were ever disposed to shed prophetic blood. Neither would he have rebuked the cruel tyrant with such courage, in the face of all the city and the people, if those who heard him could chide him as a coward.

If he had become timid, why was he not ashamed to send his own disciples, in whose presence he had borne testimony, to so many and to such tremendous things? Yet he inquired through them, when he ought rather to have put his question through others; especially since he knew well that they were envious of Christ, and were but seeking to find fault with Him. And how was it he was not also ashamed before the Jewish people; he who had prophesied to them so many things?

And whence could any help come to him, to free him from prison? For it was not on account of Christ that he was thrown there, or because he had proclaimed His Kingdom, but because he had condemned an unlawful union. Would it not rather be the conduct of a weak man, or of a worldly man, to win public favour for himself?

What then is in question here?

From what has been said there can be no question of doubt, as regards John, nor indeed of anybody, in like circumstances, even a weak minded person. We must then give an answer. Why did he send to ask? The disciples of John were moved by jealousy against Christ, as is seen from what they once said to their master: *He who was with thee across the Jordan, to whom you gave testimony, behold he baptizeth, and all men come to Him* (Jn. iii. 26). And again from the complaint made by the Jews, and by one of the disciples of John: *We and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast.*

2. They did not yet know who Christ was; thinking that He was a mere man, but that John was more than a man, they were grieved at seeing Jesus now celebrated, and John's fame growing less; even as he had himself foretold. This attitude had kept them from drawing near to the Lord; envy holding them back. As long as John was among his disciples, he endeavoured to convince them of the truth regarding Christ. But now about to leave them, because of the death he expected at the hands of Herod, he was gravely concerned over them. He feared to leave them in an unsettled state of belief; and that they might remain thus separated from Christ towards Whom he had from the beginning striven to guide them. And since he had failed, now nearing his end, he tried again with great earnestness.

Had he said to them: "Go, follow Him, for He is greater than me," he would not have convinced them, and further, through speak-

ing in this way, they would have believed that he spoke out of humility, and would only have become more attached to him. If he remains silent, the situation remains as it was.

What then does he do? He waits till he hears from them that Christ is working signs and wonders. Nor does he send all of them; just two, whom perhaps he believed more prejudiced than the rest; so that the questioning might be without suspicion, so that from what they saw, they might then learn how great was the distance between him and Christ. So he says: *Go ye and say: art thou he that is to come, or look we for another?*

Christ, understanding the mind of John, did not immediately reply: "Yes, I am He", for that would have offended His hearers; though it could well be answered. But he allowed them to learn the answer from the deeds they witnessed. For it is narrated, that then and there *He cured many from among those who came to Him*. Where would be the sequence of this action if, questioned as to whether He was the One, He makes no reply but immediately begins to cure the sick, unless that He wished to do as I say? He deemed testimony from deeds more credible than any words, and less liable to suspicion.

Since then as God He knew with what purpose John had sent those men, He forthwith heals the blind, the lame, and many others; not so as to instruct John; for why instruct one who already knew and believed: but that He might confirm the minds of John's doubting disciples. And then when He had cured many, He says: *Go and relate to John what you have seen and heard.*

The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the Gospel preached to them. Then He adds: *And blessed is he that shall not be scandalised in Me*; showing that He knew the secret thoughts of their hearts.

If He had said, in answer to their direct question, *I am*, He would have offended them, as I have said before, and they would have thought, though they might not have said, that which the Jews had already said to Him: *Thou givest testimony of Thyself* (Jn. viii. 13). And so He did not say this, but so disposed that from His miracles they would learn that which they needed to know; giving them in this manner an answer that was simple and unanswerable.

In the same way He added the last sentence; secretly rebuking them. For they had been scandalised in Him. He had seen into their souls, and calling no one to witness their inward railing against Himself, He left this to their own consciences, and so drew them the more to Him by saying simply: *Blessed is he that is not scandalised in Me.* He said this, revealing themselves to themselves.

Let however we appear to be giving only our own opinion in this question, we think it desirable to present to you that also which has been said by others, so that from a comparison of opinions, the truth may be evident. Now what do others say about John sending his disciples? That the explanation which we give is not the true one; that John did not really know; that he did not know fully; that he knew indeed that this was truly the Christ, but that He was to die for men John did not know, and so for this

reason he asks: *art thou he that art to come*, that is, *who is about to descend into hell?*

This conflicts with right reason. John was not ignorant of this truth. For he had proclaimed it from the first, when he said to his disciples: *Behold the lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world.* He here truly calls Him lamb, thus foretelling the Cross, as when he says: *Who taketh away the sins of the world*, he signifies the same thing. For in no other way than that of the Cross was this accomplished. This Paul has also declared: *He cancelled the deed which excluded us, the decree made to our prejudice, swept it out of the way by nailing it to the Cross* (Col. ii. 14).

Again, when he said: *He shall baptise with the Holy Ghost* (Lk. iii. 16), he foretold that which was to happen after the Resurrection. But, they say; that He was to rise again from the dead John knew, and also that He would bestow the Holy Spirit; but he did not know that Christ was to be nailed to a cross. But how was He to rise again, Who would neither have suffered, nor have been crucified? How was he greater than the prophets, if he knew not the things the prophets knew?

3. That John was more than a prophet Christ has testified (Lk. vii. 28). That the prophets foreknew the passion of Christ, there is no one who does not know. *Isaiah* says (Is. liii. 7): *He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, He stood before the shearer and without voice.* Even before this testimony he had said: *And a root shall be in Jesse, and He who shall rise up will rule the nations and in Him the gentiles shall hope* (Is. x. 11).

Not alone does he foretell that He will be fastened to the Cross, but with whom He will suffer: *and He shall be refuted among thieves*. Not alone does he foretell this, but also that He shall offer no defence of Himself: *And He opened not His mouth*; again, that He would be unjustly condemned: *and He was taken away from distress, and from judgment* (Is. liii. 8).

Before Isaias David also had spoken, and described the judgment: *Why did the Gentiles rage, and the people meditate vain things? . . . against the Lord and against His Christ* (Acts iv. 25)? Elsewhere he speaks of the manner of the crucifixion: *They have pierced my hands and my feet* (Ps. xxi. 17). Again he accurately describes what the soldiers had dared to do: *They parted my garments among them, and upon my vestures they cast lots* (Ps. xxi. 19). Elsewhere he speaks of the proffered vinegar; *and they gave me gall for my food and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink* (Ps. lxxviii. 22).

The prophets therefore, so many years before, spoke of the judgment, the condemnation, the companions of the Cross, the division of the garments, the casting of lots, and so many other events. It is unnecessary to relate them all lest our sermon run too long. He then who is greater than all the prophets, did not know these things? How can this be sustained? Why then did he not say: *art thou he who is to descend into hell*, and not simply: *art thou He that is to come?*

What is more ridiculous is that they say that John said this so that going down to hell he might preach Him there. To those who propound such notions is it aptly

said: *brethren, do not become children in understanding, but in malice be as children* (I Cor. xiv. 20). For the present life is the time for doing good; after death there is but judgment and justice; for it is written: *in hell who shall confess thee* (Ps. vi. 6)?

But how hath he broken the *gates of brass, and brought down the iron bars?* (Ps. cvi. 16) Through His Body. For then for the first time hath appeared a Body, that was immortal, and ending the tyranny of death; as it made plain to all that the dominion of death was overcome, but not that the sins of those who died before His Coming were cancelled.

For if this were not so, but all who were from the beginning in hell were pardoned, how could the Lord Himself declare: *It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of Judgment?* (Lk. x. 12.) Which certainly shows that these will also be punished, though not as severely. And though they have suffered punishment in this life also, not for that reason will they escape retribution in the next. And if they who have here been so gravely punished, shall also be punished there, how much more severely shall they be punished, who have suffered nothing in this life?

But you may say that this is a great injustice to those who died before Christ came? By no means. For men could then be saved, even though they knew not Christ. It was not required of them that they worship Him, Who had not yet come. But that setting aside false Gods they should adore the One God alone, the Creator of all things: *The Lord thy God*, He says, *is One*

God (Deut. vi. 4). So the Macchabees are honoured in that they preferred to die rather than betray the Law. We honour the Three Youths of the Fiery Furnace, and many others among the Jews, who lived good, even perfect lives, and preserved inviolate that measure of the Law that was required of them. Then it sufficed to salvation to know God alone. Now it is no longer so; the knowledge of Christ is necessary to salvation, according to His own words: *If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin* (Jn. xv. 22).

Greater things are also required of us, in the discipline of our lives. For then homicide was deemed worthy of death; now for anger a man may perish. Then to sin with another's wife, to commit adultery, was deemed worthy of grievous punishment; so now are unchaste looks. For as knowledge leads to a better life, so does discipline. Therefore there was no need of a Precursor in hell.

Again, if after death the wicked could be converted, then no one at any time would be lost. All will do penance, and all will adore. And that this last is true, hear the testimony of Paul: *That in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth* (Phil. ii. 10); and again: *And death the enemy shall be destroyed last* (I Cor. xv. 26). But this conversion would not be the effect of a good and loving will, but merely the result, if I may say so, of the pressure of the dread evils in which they find themselves.

4. But let us put such notions far from us; as old wives' tales and

entirely foolish. Let us listen to Paul, so positively differing from any such ideas: *For whosoever have sinned without the Law, shall perish without the Law* (Rom. ii. 12); which was said by him concerning those who were before the Law; *and whosoever have sinned in the Law, shall be judged by the law*; that is those who came after Moses. And again: *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness* (Rom. i. 18). And again: *wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that worketh evil, the Jew first, and also the Greek* (Rom. ii. 8, 9).

And truly did the heathen suffer much tribulation on this account, from the vengeance of God, as the Scriptures, as well as the histories of other peoples reveal. Who can ever describe what the Babylonians have endured? Miseries that equal anything in tragedy. And who shall accurately recount the plagues and sufferings of Egypt?

That they who died before Christ, and accordingly knew Him not, could attain to happiness and eternal joys, if, abandoning the worship of idols, they adored the true God and tried to live justly, again hear Paul: *glory, and honour, and peace to every one that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*. Behold here, openly laid up for them, are the rewards of all who have done good; as against the torments and punishments that await those who have done all things contrarily.

Where are they, where, I ask, who believe there is no hell? For if they who lived before the advent of Christ, who had never heard the name of hell, or heard of the resurrection, and who having en-

dured punishment in this life, are also to be punished in the next, what then of us brought up on the highest teaching of wisdom? But on what ground should they go to hell who have never heard of hell? They would say to us: if you had threatened us with hell, if we had known, we would have lived better lives? Perhaps. But perhaps also they might have lived, as we are living, who daily hear sermons about hell, and live as if we had not?

Besides, this also may be said: whoever is not restrained by the punishments of this present life, will be less likely to overcome through fear of future punishment. For the general run of men are made fearful by present, rather than by future evils. But again, a man may say: why torment ourselves with the fear of a greater punishment to come, since men are still punished in hell who were never tormented by this greater fear? It is not so. For first we have to remember that the same demands are not made of them, and of us. Much more is required of us. And he from whom more is required has need of more help. And this added fear of hell is no slight help and safeguard. And if we thus are stronger, knowing the wrath to come, they had another advantage, in that they were punished more speedily and more vehemently.

But some will say to me: how is God just; since if a man sins, he will be punished both here and there? Do you wish me to recall to you your own words, so that without labour of mine you may have the answer from yourselves? I have myself heard some among you say, when they learned that some

thief or murderer was condemned to death, What! for the thirty murders or more that thief and murderer has committed, he dies but one death? Where is there justice here? You say yourself that he does not satisfy justice, who expiates his crimes with one sole death. Why now do you profess a different opinion? Shall I tell you why? Because you are judging others, and not yourselves. But in what concerns ourselves we are hindered by our too great love of self from seeing what is just, for then we are involved in shadows and understand but little. But if we examined our own case, with the sharp scrutiny we give the affairs of others, we should give a sincere and honest opinion. Our sins deserve, not one, but many deaths.

Let us recall here, omitting other offences, how often have we received the body of Christ unworthily. We are not ignorant that they who so receive, are *guilty of the body and blood of Christ*. When, therefore, you speak of a homicide, think to yourself whether you have not the same guilt upon you? Recollect that that man killed someone who was but a mere man; but that you are guilty of the blood of the Lord. He was not a sharer in the divine mysteries; we are nourished from the sacred table. What shall I say of those who eat, who devour their neighbours, with their cruel speech; pouring poison into them? What of those who take away the bread of the poor? If he who never gives an alms in charity does this, how much more evil he, who deliberately steals what is another's? And the mean and covetous are they not worse than

many thieves? How many great thieves and despoilers are there, who are worse than murderers and the defilers of tombs? Have we not heard often of those who not content to rob, hunger also for the blood of their victims? No, no, you will say, But I would wish that you could say, no, no, when assailed by an enemy.

I ask that you keep all that I say before your memory; that living according to what is worthy, you may escape the punishment of Sodom. Let not the dread evils of Sodom draw near to you, lest you

suffer the visitations of Tyre, and the punishments of Sodom, and lest, above all, you offend Christ; which to me appears as the evil to be feared above all others. For though to others hell is the last and supreme punishment, this I believe, this I shall without ceasing proclaim: it is more dreadful to offend Christ, than to be tormented in hell. I pray and exhort you, that in this you be of one mind with me. So shall we both escape hell, and enjoy the glory of Christ, to whom be honour and praise for ever and ever, Amen.

IV. ST PATRICK, BISHOP AND CONFESSOR

SERMON FOR ADVENT

(From the Book of the Three Habitations)⁵

Three are the abodes subject to the Almighty Hand of God; that on high, that in the depths, and that which is between; of which the first is named the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of heaven, the lowest is called hell, and the middle abode is the present world, or this earth. Of these abodes the two extremes are wholly opposed, the one against the other; and between them is no bond of any kind. And indeed what fellowship hath light with darkness, or Christ with Belial? (II Cor. vi. 14) But the middle abode has many resemblances to the two extremes.

Whence it has light and darkness, cold and heat, it has pain and it has sound health, sadness and joy, love and hate, good as well as bad, just and unjust, servants and masters, servitude and dominion, hunger and satiety, life and death, and endless such similarities. Of all which the one half has likeness unto

heaven, the other unto hell. For the commingling together of good and evil belongs to this world; but in the Kingdom of God there are none evil, but all are good; in hell none are good, but all are evil. And either place is filled from the middle abode.

For of the people of this middle world, some are raised to heaven; others are borne down into hell. Like are joined to like, that is, the good are joined to the good, the evil to the evil; just men are joined to the just angels, and sinful men to the angels that have sinned; the servants of God are united to God; the servants of the devil are united with the devil; the Blessed are invited to possess *the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world*; and the Accursed are cast down into *the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels* (Mt. xxv. 34, 41).

The Joys of the Kingdom of God

no man can tell, nor even conceive or understand, while he is yet clothed in the flesh; for they are greater and more wondrous than they are imagined or conceived to be. Whence it is written: *that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him* (I Cor. ii. 9). For the Kingdom of God is greater than all report, better than all praise of it, more manifold than all knowledge, more perfect than every conceivable glory. The miseries of hell, as they truly are, no tongue can tell; no mind conceive; for in their reality they are far more dreadful than they are thought to be.

And likewise the Kingdom of God is so full of light, and peace, and charity, and wisdom, and glory, and honesty, and sweetness, and loving kindness, and every unspeakable and unutterable good, that it can neither be described nor envisioned by the mind. But the abode of hell is so full of darkness, of discord, of hate, of folly, of unhappiness, of pain, of burning heat, of thirst, of inextinguishable fire, of sadness, of unending punishment, and of every indescribable evil that neither can it be told nor yet conceived by man.

The citizens of heaven are the

just and the angels, whose King is Almighty God; the people of hell are evil men and the demons, whose prince is the Devil. The just are filled with the vision of the holy people of God and of the angels, and, above all, by the Vision of God Himself. The evil and the impious are tormented by the sight of the damned, and the demons, and, above all, by the sight of the Devil himself.

In the Kingdom of God nothing is desired that may not be found: but in hell, nothing is found that is desired. In the Kingdom of God is nothing that does not delight and satisfy; while in that deep lake of unending misery nothing is seen, nothing is felt, which does not displease, which does not torment

In the Kingdom of God every good abounds and there is nothing of evil; in the prison of hell every evil abounds and there is nothing of good. In the kingdom of heaven no one who is unworthy is received; but no one worthy, no just one, is brought down to hell. In the eternal Kingdom there shall be life without death, truth without any falsehood, and happiness without shadow of unrest or change, in Christ Jesus Our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth world without end, Amen.

V. ST GREGORY: ON THE GOSPEL

Sermon given to the people in the Basilica of SS. Marcellinus and Peter⁶

I. We have here to ask, dearest brethren, why John a prophet, and now more than a prophet, who had testified to the Lord as He came to the baptism of the Jordan, saying: *Behold the lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world* (Jn. i. 29); and who regarding both

His humility and the power of His divinity, declared: *He that is of the earth, of the earth he speaketh. He that cometh from Heaven, is above all* (Jn. iii. 31), now in prison, sending his disciples, enquired: *Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another?*

As if he knew not Him whom he himself had pointed out; as if he now were ignorant of Him Whom he had himself proclaimed by prophesying concerning Him, by baptizing Him, by pointing Him out to others. But this question is quickly solved if both the time and the order of the event be considered. By the waters of the Jordan he had asserted that He was the Redeemer of the world; now, thrown into prison, he enquires if He is to come, not because he doubts that He is the Redeemer of the world, but he seeks to learn whether He Who, of His own will, came into the world, will also, of His own will, descend into hell? He who, by going before Him, had announced Him to the world, the same, now dying, goes down before Him into hell.

He says therefore: *Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another?* As if to say: since for men Thou hast deigned to be born, will You also deign for men to undergo death so that I who have been the Precursor of Thy Birth, may also become the Precursor of Thy Death: to announce Thee as about to descend into hell, as already I have announced Thee as come into this world? And the Lord being thus asked, having first given manifest proofs of His power forthwith answers in words that foreshadow also the abjection of His own death; saying: *The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he that shall not be scandalised in me.*

Who could not be astonished rather than scandalised at the sight of so many signs and wonders? But the mind of the unbelieving

suffered grievous scandal in Him, when after so many miracles they saw Him dying. Whence Paul has said: *We preach Christ Crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness* (I Cor. i. 23). For to men it did indeed seem foolish, that the Author of life should die for men: and so man has taken scandal at Him, whence he ought rather to become yet more His debtor. For the more He has borne indignities for men, the more fittingly is God to be honoured of men.

What then does He mean by the words: *Blessed is he that shall not be scandalised in me*, if not to signify clearly the abjection and lowliness of His own death? As if He were openly to say: I indeed work wonders, but I disdain not to endure humiliations. Because, however, I shall go thy way to death, men must take care not to despise Me in death, who now honour Me because of these wonders.

2. The disciples of John going their way, let us hear what He says to the multitude concerning the same John. *What went you out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind?* Here He reproves them, not by asserting, but by denying something. Scarcely does the breath of a breeze touch a reed, when it bends the other way. And what is here meant by a reed unless a worldly human soul? Which, as soon as it is touched either by praise, or by detraction, is immediately inclined whatsoever way you will.

For if the wind of acclaim from a human mouth should caress it, it rejoices, it is lifted up, and bends itself over in gratitude. But should

the wind of detraction blow from whence has already come the breath of praise, it immediately bends again the other way, yielding to the force of the storm. But John was no reed shaken by the wind, for he was neither flattered by praise, nor angered by detraction. Neither did prosperity uplift him, nor adversity cast him down. A reed shaken by the wind John was not, but a man whom no change of circumstances would turn aside from his path. Let us also learn, my dearest Brethren, not to be as reeds, shaken by the winds. Let us keep firm of soul amid the varying winds of men's tongues; let our minds be steadfast. Neither let detraction provoke us to anger; and let no favour move us to bestow some harmful gift. Let good fortune not exalt us, nor adversity cause us unrest of soul, so that anchored to the security of faith, we may in no way be moved by the insecurity of temporal things.

3. Our Saviour continues to praise John's austerity: *But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold they that are clothed in soft garments, are in the houses of kings.* John is described as being clothed in a garment of camel hair. And what means, *behold they that are clothed in soft garments are in the houses of kings*, unless that he openly makes it plain that they fight not for a heavenly but for an earthly kingdom, who in God's service ever shun what is painful, give themselves over solely to outward things, and seek the soft things and the delights of this life.

Let no one believe that sin can ever be absent from soft living, and from the love of precious

clothing. Because if there were no fault in it, Our Lord would scarcely have praised John for the austerity of his clothing. If there were no fault, neither would the Apostle Peter have reproved women in his Epistle for this very desire for precious garments, saying: *not in costly attire* (I Pet. iii. 2; I Tim. ii. 9). Consider then, what fault there may be should men also seek for the things from which the Pastor of the church has said that even women should abstain.

4. That John is said not to be clothed in soft garments can be interpreted in yet another way. He was not clothed in soft garments, because he did not condone with flattery the conduct of those who lived in sin, but rather upbraided them in bitter words, saying: *Ye brood of vipers who hath showed you to flee from the wrath to come?* (Lk. iii. 7.) Whence Solomon also has said: *The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails deeply fastened in* (Eccles. xii. 11). The words of the wise are compared to nails, and likewise to goads, because they do not caress, but pierce the follies of sinners.

5. *But what went you out to see? A prophet? Yea, I tell you and more than a prophet.* It is the prophet's office to foretell future events, not also to point them out. For this reason John was more than a prophet, because Him, of Whom he had prophesied, going before Him, he also pointed out, showing Him to his own disciples. Since it is denied that he is a reed shaken by the wind, since he is said not to be clothed in soft garments, since the name of prophet is inadequate to him, let us hear what then may fittingly be affirmed of him.

6. It follows on: *This is he of whom it is written: Behold I send my Angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee* (Mal. iii. 1). That which is called *angelus* in Greek, is in Latin messenger (*nuntius*). Fittingly therefore is he called Angel, who is sent to announce the Heavenly Judge; so that he may be in name that which he fulfils in his office. Exalted indeed is his name; but his life was no less exalted than his name.

7. Would, my dear Brethren, that we say not this to our own condemnation, namely: that all who are called by the name of priest, are also named as angels, as the prophet testifies; saying: *For the lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth: because he is the angel of the Lord of hosts* (Mal. ii. 7).

You likewise can reach to the sublimity of this name, if you so wish. For each one among you, in as far as he is able, in as far as he responds to the grace of the heavenly invitation, should he recall his neighbour from evil-doing; should he seek to encourage him in doing what is good; when he reminds him of the eternal kingdom, or of the punishment of wrong-doers; whenever he employs words of holy import, he is indeed an angel. And let no one say: I am not capable of giving warning; I am not a fit person to exhort others. Do what you can, lest your single talent, unprofitably employed, be required of you with punishment. For he that had received no more than one talent was careful to bury it in the earth, rather than put it to profit. (Mt. xxv.)

We read that in the Tabernacle of God there were not alone golden drinking goblets but, at the command of the Lord, there also were made ladles, or spoons, for filling the drinking vessels. For the goblets here understand fulness of holy doctrine, for the ladles a small and restricted acquaintance with doctrine. One person being filled with the doctrine of sacred truth, inebriates the minds of those that hear him. Through what he says he perfectly fills the cup. Another knows that he cannot give fulness, but because he gives warnings as best he can, he truly offers a taste from his ladle!

You, therefore, who live in the Tabernacle of the Lord, that is, in the Holy Church, if you cannot fill up the goblets with the teachings of holy wisdom, as well then as you can, as far as the divine bounty has endowed you, give to your neighbours spoonfuls of the good word!

And when you consider that you have yourself made some little progress, draw others along with you; seek to make comrades on the road to God. Should one among you, Brethren, stroll out towards the forum or the baths, he will invite a friend whom he thinks is not busy to keep him company. This simple action of our ordinary life is pleasant to you, and if it be that you are going towards God, give a thought not to journey alone. Hence it is written: *He that heareth, let him say: come* (Apoc. xxii. 17); so let him who has heard in his heart the invitation of divine love, pass on to his neighbours around about him, the message of the invitation. And though a man may not have even bread where-

with to give an alms to the hungry; yet, what is still more precious, he is able to give who possesses but a tongue. For it is a greater thing to strengthen with the nourishment of a word that will feed the mind for ever, than to fill with earthly bread a stomach of perishable flesh.

Do not, my dearest Brethren, withhold from your brother the charity of a word. I admonish myself with you, that we abstain from every idle word, that we turn away from useless chatter. In as far as you are able to overcome the tongue, scatter not your words to the wind, since our Judge has said: *Every idle word that men shall speak,*

they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment. (Mt. xii. 36.)

An idle word is one that is spoken without any profit in uprightness, or that is uttered without grounds of sufficient need. Direct your idle conversation towards a fondness for what will edify; think how quickly the days of your life are passing; recall how stern is the Judge Who is coming. Keep this counsel before the eyes of your soul; bring it to mind of your neighbour, so that, as far as in you lies, you may not fail to warn him, and so you also may with John, merit to be called angels, by Him Who liveth and reigneth world without end, Amen.

NOTES

¹“We cannot doubt that whatsoever is spoken of in the psalms is to be considered as Evangelical prophecy: so that whoever it is speaks, a prophet speaks. And it is all to be referred towards the understanding of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to the knowledge of His Incarnation, Passion, and Kingdom, and to the power and glory of our own resurrection. But prophecies are closed and sealed to worldly wisdom, and to the prudence of this world.” St Hilary, Introduction to the Psalms.

² PL 9, 978.

³ This brief homily forms the three lessons of the second nocturn of this Sunday, in the Roman Breviary, and is translated from

there. The reading, and exposition, of this prophecy of Isaias, in the first and second nocturns of the Second Sunday of Advent recall the prophetic, and mystical, preparation for the Coming of the Saviour; of which the third nocturn (the Gospel lesson, and homily) sets out the immediate and historical preparation.

⁴ PG 57: hom. 36, 37. col. 413.

⁵ PL vol. 53. Not challenged in PRM. Given also, as doubtful, under the name of St Augustine, 40, Appendix.

⁶ PL. 76, 1095-1099.

⁷ This interpretation St John Chrysostom vigorously refutes. See Homily Three for this Sunday.