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## *THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE*

A translation for the 21st Century

### Part III — Sermons

#### Volume III: Sermons 51-94

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## *THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE*

A translation for the 21st Century

## *SERMONS*

### III

(51-94)

on the New Testament

*translation and notes*

Edmund Hill, O.P.

*editor*

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New City Press

Brooklyn, New York

## SERMON 81

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 18:7-9, WHERE WE ARE WARNED TO  
AVOID THE SCANDALS OF THE WORLD

Date: 410 or 411<sup>1</sup>

*The threat of scandals*

1. The divinely inspired readings,<sup>2</sup> which we heard when they were chanted just now, advise us to acquire the strength of the virtues, and thus arm our Christian breast against the scandals whose future coming was foretold, and this by the mercy of the Lord. For *what is man*, it says, *unless you are mindful of him?* (Ps 8:4). *Woe to the world because of scandals* (Mt 18:7). The Lord says it, Truth says it; he's giving us a fright and a warning, he doesn't want us to be careless; and of course he wasn't reducing us to despair. Against this "woe," that is, against this evil we have to fear and tremble at and beware of, we are reassured and encouraged and instructed by that place of scripture where it says, *Much peace to those who love your law, and for them there is no scandal* (Ps 119:165).<sup>3</sup> He showed us the enemy we have to beware of, but he never ceased also to show us the defenses fortified against it.

You, when you heard *Woe to the world because of scandals*, you were wondering where you could go outside the world in order not to have to endure scandals. So where will you go outside the world to avoid scandals, unless you take refuge with the one who made the world? And how can we all take refuge with the one who made the world, unless we listen to his law, which is preached everywhere? It's not enough to listen, unless we also love it. The divine scripture, when reassuring you against the threat of scandals, doesn't say, "Much peace to those who listen to your law." It isn't, you see, the hearers of the law who are just in God's eyes. But because it is the doers of the law who will be justified,<sup>4</sup> and because faith works through love,<sup>5</sup> *Much peace*, he says, *to those who love your law, and for these there is no scandal*.

This statement is supported by what we have been singing in the refrain of the psalm we have been listening to: *But the meek shall possess the earth for an inheritance, and shall delight in abundance of peace* (Ps 37:11). Why? Because *much peace to those who love your law*. It's these meek ones, you see, who love God's law. For *Happy is the man whom you instruct, Lord, whom you teach*

*from your law, to make him meek in the face of evil days, until a pit is dug for the sinner* (Ps 94:12-13). How various the words of scripture seem, and yet they flow and run together into one truth, so that whatever you may be able to drink in<sup>6</sup> from that inexhaustible spring, you too may assent to, agreeing with the truth as its friend, filled with peace, warm with love, armed against scandals.

*How to be meek*

2. So what we've got to do now is to see or inquire or learn how we should be meek; and from the texts of scripture I have quoted to you, we can tell we would be well advised to find what we are inquiring about. Would your graces please pay attention a little; it's an important matter we are dealing with, how to be meek; something very necessary in adverse circumstances. And in any case, it isn't just the adversities of this life that are called scandals; let's now see just what scandals consist in.

Somebody or other, for example, finding himself in some need, is under severe pressure. That's not a scandal, that he's under severe pressure.<sup>7</sup> The martyrs too were pressed under pressure but they weren't oppressed by it. Avoid scandal, mere pressure can do nothing.<sup>8</sup> Pressure just presses you, but scandal oppresses you. So what's the difference between pressure and scandal? Under pressure and affliction you were bracing yourself to preserve patient endurance, to keep up your courage, not to give up the faith, not to give in to sin. If you keep that up, or if you have kept it up, affliction and pressure won't be the ruin of you. Instead, that pressure will avail you what it avails in the oil press, where it works, not to oppress the olives but to get the oil flowing.

To conclude, if under this sort of pressure you sing God's praises, see how useful the press is which squeezes such a precious fluid out of you. Some apostles were sitting chained under great pressure, and under that pressure they began singing a hymn to God.<sup>9</sup> What was being pressed, what was being strained out?<sup>10</sup> Job was sitting under enormous pressure on the dunghill, utterly helpless, entirely without means, without fortune, without children; full indeed, but of maggots—all this as regards the outer man. But because within, as regards the inner self, he was also full of God, he began to praise God, and that severe pressure was not a scandal for him. So where did scandal come in? When his wife approached him and said, *Say something against God and die*. Yes, when he had been deprived of everything else by the devil, Eve was preserved for him in his troubled state, not to comfort but to tempt her husband.<sup>11</sup> There you are, that's where the scandal is. She exaggerated his miseries, and her own too that she had to endure with him, and set about persuading him to blaspheme. He however, being meek because God had taught him from his law and made him meek in the face of evil days, had much peace in his heart, loving the law of God, and for him there was no scandal. She was a scandal, but not for him.

To conclude, see how meek he was, how well instructed in the law of God, I mean in God's eternal law. You see, the law given to the Jews on stone tablets<sup>12</sup> didn't yet exist in the days of Job, but the eternal law was still lodged in the

hearts of the godly, and it was from there that the law given to the people of Israel was transcribed. So because Job had been made meek by the law of God in the face of evil days, and there was much peace for him as he loved the law of God, just see how meek he is, and how he answers. Learn here the lesson I set, who the meek really are. *You have spoken*, he says, *like the silly woman you are. If we have received good things from the hand of the Lord, can we not endure evil things?* (Job 2:7-10).

*What do the meek do*

3. We have heard by an example who the meek are; let's try and define them in words, if we can. The meek are those who, in all their good deeds, in everything they do well, only find pleasure in God, and who, in all the evil things they suffer, don't get annoyed with God. Come on then, brothers and sisters, pay attention to this rule, this standard; let's stretch ourselves to measure up to it, let's look for growth, in order to fulfill it. After all, what's the use of our planting and watering, unless God gives the growth? *Neither the one who plants is anything, nor the one who waters, but God who gives the growth* (1 Cor 3:7). Listen, you that wish to be meek, who wish to be made meek in face of evil days, who love the law of God; in order that there may be no scandal in you, and there may be much peace for you, that you may possess the land and delight in abundance of peace, listen, you that wish to be meek, Whatever good you do, don't be pleased with yourself about it, since *God withstands the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (Prov 3:34; Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5). So whatever good you do, be pleased only with God about it; whatever evil you suffer, don't be displeased with God about it. What else? *Do this, and you shall live* (Lk 10:28). Evil days won't swallow you up, you will escape the menace of the words, *Woe to the world because of scandals* (Mt 18:7).

I mean, to which world is it woe because of scandals, if not the one of which it was said, *And the world did not know him* (Jn 1:10)? It isn't to the world of which it was said, *God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself* (2 Cor 5:19). There's a bad world, there's a good world; the bad world is all the bad people in the world, and the good world is all the good people in the world. We notice the same thing very often in a field. This field is full of what crop? Wheat. And again we can say, and with complete truth, "The field is full of straw." There's a tree, it's full of fruit. Someone else says, "It's full of leaves." The one who says it's full of fruit is telling the truth, and the one who says it's full of leaves is telling the truth. The full complement of leaves hasn't left the fruit with no room, and the full complement of fruit hasn't crowded out the leaves. It's full of both, but the wind seeks out the one, the cultivator picks the other. So then, when you hear, *Woe to the world because of scandals*, don't panic. Love the law of God, and it won't be a scandal for you.

*Throw it away from you means don't conserve*

4. But here comes your wife, suggesting heaven knows what piece of wickedness to you.<sup>13</sup> You love her, as a wife ought to be loved; she's part of you. But, *if your eye scandalizes you, if your hand scandalizes you, if your foot scandalizes you*, you heard the gospel just now, *cut it off, throw it away from you* (Mt 18:89). Anybody who's dear to you, anybody you value highly, let such persons be great in your eyes, let them be your beloved better half, just as long as they don't start scandalizing you, that is, suggesting some piece of wickedness to you. Listen to a proof that that's what scandal is. I've given you the instance of Job and his wife; but the word "scandal" wasn't mentioned there. So listen to the gospel: when the Lord was foretelling his passion, Peter started to suggest that he shouldn't suffer. *Get behind me, Satan, you are a scandal to me*. The Lord who was giving you an example of how to live taught you there very precisely both what scandal is, and how scandal should be dodged. A moment earlier he had said to him, *Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona* (Mt 16:23.17), and had thus shown that he was one of his parts or members. But as soon as he began to be a scandal, he cut off the part; he refashioned the part, he replaced the part . . .<sup>14</sup> So anyone will be a scandal to you, who undertakes to persuade you to do something bad.

And please notice, your graces, this often happens, not out of ill-will, but out of a perverse good will. Your friend sees you, one who loves you and is loved by you in return, your father, your brother, your son, your wife, sees you in some evil straits, and wants you to do evil. What do I mean, he sees you in evil straits? He sees you in trouble, under pressure. Perhaps you are suffering this pressure because of justice; the reason you are being pressurized is that you are unwilling to give false evidence. It's just an example, of course. There are hundreds of other examples of *Woe to the world because of scandals*. So here you are, for example, with some influential man asking of you the favor of a little false evidence to assist him in his land-grabbing, in his takeover bids. You, for your part, refuse; you refuse to lie, in order not to deny the truth. To cut a long story short, he gets angry, he has influence in high places, he puts the squeeze on you. Your friend comes along, who doesn't like you being squeezed, doesn't like you being in bad trouble. "Please, I beg you, do what he suggests; is it such a big thing?"

Now perhaps he tries what Satan tried on the Lord: *It is written about you that he has commanded his angels about you, lest you hurt your foot upon a stone* (Mt 4:6; Ps 91:11-12). Perhaps this friend of yours too, knowing that you are a Christian, wants to use the law<sup>15</sup> to persuade you to do what he thinks you ought to.

"Do what he says."

"What?"

"This thing the man wants."

"But it's a lie, it's untrue."

"Haven't you read, *Every man is a liar*" (Ps 116:11)? Now indeed he's a scandal. He's a friend, what are you going to do? He's an eye, he's a hand: *Cut*

it off and throw it away from you. What's the meaning of *Cut it off and throw it away from you*? Don't consent. That's what *Cut it off and throw it away from you* means: don't consent. In our bodies, you see, our various parts form a unity by consent, they live by consent, they are connected with each other by consent. Wherever there is dissent, it means a disease or a wound. So, he's a part of you, you love him. But he's scandalizing you. Cut him off and throw him away, don't consent to him. Shoo him away from your ears, perhaps he will be corrected and come back.

*The law says, Do not lie*

5. How are you going to do what I say, going to cut him off and throw him away, and thereby possibly correct him? Tell me how you are going to do it. He wanted to use the law to persuade you to lie. "Tell it," he said. Or perhaps he didn't have the nerve to say, "Tell a lie," but he put it like this: "Say what he wants." You say, "But it's a lie." And he, to give you an excuse, replies, "*Every man is a liar*." And you, brother, must counter, "*The mouth that lies kills the soul*" (Wis 1:11).

Notice, it's no light thing you've just heard, *The mouth that lies kills the soul*.

"What does this influential enemy, this Mr. Big, do to me by pressurizing me, so that you should be sorry for me, and be distressed by my condition, and not want me to be in this evil state, while you actually wish me to be evil? What can this Mr. Big do to me? What is he putting the squeeze on? My flesh."

"It's your body," you say, "he's squeezing. I say he's squeezing the life out of it."

"How much more kindly he's dealing with me than I will be dealing with myself if I lie! He can kill my flesh, I can kill my soul." When Mr. Big gets angry, he kills the body; *the mouth that lies kills the soul*. He kills the body; it was going to die anyway, even if it wasn't killed. But the soul which is not killed by iniquity is received by the Truth<sup>16</sup> into eternity. So keep what you can keep; let that perish which is going to perish sometime anyhow.

You've answered, and told me how you are going to cut him off and throw him away. And yet you haven't solved the problem of *Every man is a liar*. Answer him on this point too, or he may think he has said something real to persuade you to lie, quoting evidence from the law, urging you by the law to act against the law. In the law, you see, it's written, *You shall not bear false witness* (Dt 5:20); and in the law it is also written *Every man is a liar* (Ps 116:11). Look at what I mentioned a short while ago, when I defined the meek person in the most suitable words I could find. The meek person is the one who, in everything he does well, is pleased only with God, and in everything evil that he suffers is not displeased with God. So this is what you should answer the one who says, "Tell a lie, because it is written, *Every man is a liar*": "I won't lie, because it is written, *The mouth that lies kills the soul*; I won't lie, because it is written, *You will destroy all those who utter falsehood* (Ps 5:6); I won't lie, because it is written, *You shall not bear false witness*. Although the man I displease because

of my stand for truth is pressurizing my flesh with afflictions, I hear my Lord saying, *Do not fear those who kill the body*" (Mt 10:28).

*Acknowledge Christ, and ascend by the man to God*

6. So how is every man a liar? Or perhaps you aren't a man? Answer straightaway, and with truth, "I'd rather not be a man, in order not to be a liar." Consider the following, after all: *God looked forth from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there is any who understands, or seeks God. All have turned aside, they have become useless together; there is none who does good, there is not even one* (Ps 14:23). Why? Because they wanted to be sons of men. But in order to lift them out of these iniquities, to redeem, to cure, to heal, to change the sons of men, he gave them the power and right to become sons of God.<sup>17</sup>

So what's so surprising about this text? You were men, if you were sons of men; you were all men, you were all liars, because every man is a liar. The grace of God came to you, it gave you the power and right to become sons of God. Listen to the voice of my Father saying, *I said you are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High* (Ps 82:6). Because you are sons of men, you are liars, if you are not sons of the Most High, because every man is a liar. If you are sons of God, if redeemed by the grace of the Savior, if bought by his precious blood, if born again by water and the Spirit, if predestined to the heavenly inheritance, then of course you are sons of God. So you are already gods. So what's lying got to do with you?

Adam, you see, was man and nothing else; Christ is the man-God, God the creator of every creature. Adam was a man, Christ the man, the mediator of God, the only Son of the Father, God and man. There you are, a man far from God, and God is up above far from man; the God man placed himself in the middle. Acknowledge Christ, and ascend by the man to God.

*Troubles and pressures are not scandals but training exercises*

7. So now that we have been corrected,<sup>18</sup> and become meek if we have done anything wrong, let us hold on to our unchangeable confession.<sup>19</sup> Let us love the law of God, to escape the words, *Woe to the world because of scandals* (Mt 18:7). Let us say something now about the scandals the world is full of, and how scandals multiply, and afflictions and pressure abound. The world is devastated, the press is trodden. Come now, Christians, heavenly seed, strangers on earth who seek a city in heaven, who long to associate with the holy angels, understand that you have come here simply in order to take your departure.<sup>20</sup> You are passing through the world, striving toward him who created the world. Don't let the lovers of the world disturb you, those who wish to remain in the world, and willy-nilly are compelled to emigrate from it; don't let them deceive you, or lead you astray.

These troubles and pressures are not scandals. Be just, and they will be training exercises. Trouble comes; it will be whichever you wish, your education

or your condemnation. Which it will be will depend on what sort of thing it finds you to be. Trouble is like fire; does it find you to be gold? It removes your impurities. Does it find you to be straw? It reduces you to ashes.<sup>21</sup> So it's not the pressures, which certainly abound, that are the scandals. So what are the scandals? Those little speeches, those words in which we are told, "Look what Christian times are producing",<sup>22</sup> that's where the scandals are. You see, the point of saying this to you is to make you blaspheme against Christ, if you love the world.

Now it's your friend that says this to you, your guide and mentor; so, your eye. It's your assistant who says this to you, your mate at work; so, your hand. Perhaps it's the person who supports you that says this to you, the one who has raised you up from a humble station in worldly terms; so, your foot. *Get rid of it, cut it off, throw it away from you* (Mt 18:8-9), don't consent. Answer such people the same way as the one answered who was being urged to give false evidence. Give them an answer, yes, you too. Say to the person who says to you, "Look at all the terrible things happening in Christian times, the world is being laid waste"; you answer like this: "Even before this happened, Christ foretold it to me."

*The world has grown old*

8. Why, after all, are you upset? Your heart is upset by the pressures of the world in the same way as that boat was, when Christ was asleep.<sup>23</sup> There you have the reason, Mr. Worldly Wise Man,<sup>24</sup> why your heart is upset, there you have the reason. This boat in which Christ is asleep is the heart in which faith is asleep. I mean, is anything really new being said to you, Christian? Is anything really new being said? In these Christian times the world is being laid waste, the world is going to pieces. Didn't your Lord tell you, "The world will be laid waste"? Didn't your Lord tell you, "The world will go to pieces"? Why did you believe it when it was foretold, and get upset now when it is fulfilled?<sup>25</sup> That's why the storm is raging in your heart; beware of shipwreck, rouse up Christ. *That Christ may dwell*, says the apostle, *through faith in your hearts* (Eph 3:17). It's through faith that Christ dwells in you. Faith present, Christ is present; faith wide awake, Christ is wide awake; faith forgotten, Christ is asleep. Wake up, bestir yourself, say, "*Lord, we are lost!*" (Lk 8:24, Mt 8:25). Look what the pagans are saying to us—much more serious, what bad Christians are saying to us. *Arise, Lord* (Ps 43:23), *we are lost!*"

Just let your faith wake up, and Christ immediately starts talking to you. "Why are you upset? I told you about all this long ago. The reason I foretold it was so that, when bad times came, you could hope for good times, and not go to pieces in bad times. Are you astonished at the world going to pieces? You might as well be astonished that the world has grown old. The world's like a man; he's born, he grows up, he grows old. Old age is full of complaints: coughing, phlegm, bleary eyes, aches and pains, weariness, it's all there. So, a man has grown old; he's full of complaints. The world has grown old; it's full of troubles and pressures."

God has provided for you too little, too late, is that it, by sending you Christ in the world's old age, to put you together again when everything else was going to pieces? Didn't you know this was all signified in the seed of Abraham? The seed of Abraham, as the apostle says, is Christ. *It doesn't say, To seeds, as if to many; but as if to one, To your seed, which is Christ* (Gal 3:16). That's why a son was born to Abraham when he was an old man, because of course Christ was going to come in the world's old age. He came when everything had grown old, and he made you as good as new. A thing that had been made, been set up, that was going to perish, was declining to its end. It was bound to be beset with difficulties; he came, both to encourage you among these difficulties, and also to carry you forward to eternal rest. Don't be eager to cling to an aged world, and unwilling to grow young in Christ, who says to you, "The world is perishing, the world is aging, the world is going to pieces, with the labored, wheezy breathing of old age. Don't be afraid, *your youth shall be renewed like the eagle's* (Ps 103:5)."

*The fall of Rome in Christian times*

9. "There you are," he says, "it's Christian times, and Rome is destroyed." Perhaps Rome isn't destroyed; perhaps it has been scourged, not put to death, chastised perhaps, not obliterated. Perhaps Rome isn't perishing, if Romans aren't perishing. I mean, they won't perish, if they praise God; they will, if they blaspheme him.<sup>26</sup> What is Rome, after all, but Romans? I mean, we are not concerned with bricks and mortar, with high apartment blocks and extensive city walls. All this was put up in such a way that it would one day fall into ruin. When men built, they put stone upon stone; when they destroyed, they took the stones apart. Men put it up, men pulled it down.

Is it an insult to Rome to say it's falling down? "Not to Rome, but perhaps to its builder." So do we insult its founder when we say Rome, which Romulus founded, is in ruins? The whole world is going to burn up,<sup>27</sup> and that was founded by God. But anything put up by men only collapses when God wishes, and anything put up by God only falls into ruin when God wishes. So if the works of men don't fall down unless God wills, can the works of God collapse at the will of men? And yet God made you a world that would eventually collapse, and for that reason he also made you, eventually due to die.

It's human beings who are the pride of a city, human beings who inhabit, plan and govern a city, and they come just to go, are born just to die, come in just to pass on. *Heaven and earth will pass away* (Mt 24:35); so why be surprised if a city sometimes comes to an end? And it's possible, of course, that the city's end hasn't come yet; sometime, though, the city's end will come.<sup>28</sup>

"But why is Rome falling amid the sacrifices of the Christians?" And why did its mother, Troy, go up in flames amid the sacrifices of the pagans? The gods in whom the Romans placed their hopes, the thoroughly Roman gods in whom the pagan Romans placed their hopes, migrated to the founding of Rome from a Troy that had been burnt to the ground. These very Roman gods had first been

Trojan gods. When Troy was burned, Aeneas took away its fugitive gods; or rather, a fugitive himself, he took away its lumpish, inanimate gods. I mean, they could be carried by a fugitive; they were quite unable to flee themselves. And so he came with these gods to Italy, and with false gods he founded Rome.<sup>29</sup> It would take too long to follow all this up. Let me just quote briefly, however, from their own literature. One of their authors everyone knows has this to say: *The city of Rome, as I have gathered, was first founded and occupied by Trojans, who as refugees under the leadership of Aeneas were wandering about with nowhere definite to settle.*<sup>30</sup>

So they had their gods with them, they founded Rome in Latium, they placed there to be worshiped the gods which had been worshiped in Troy. Their poet brings Juno on the scene, angry with Aeneas and the fleeing Trojans, and she says:

*My enemies the Tyrrhenian sea  
Are sailing, Ilium to Italy  
Transferring, and its conquered talismans,*<sup>31</sup>

that is, carrying conquered gods with them to Italy. Now, when conquered gods were carried to Italy, was it a numinous sign, or an ominous one?<sup>32</sup>

So then, love God's law, and don't let all this be a scandal for you. I beg you, I beseech you, I exhort you all to be meek, to show compassion to those who are suffering, to take care of the weak; and at this time of many refugees from abroad, to be generous in your hospitality, generous in your good works. Let Christians do what Christ commands, and the blasphemies of the pagans can hurt none but themselves.

### NOTES

1. Preached at Hippo sometime in 410 or 411.
2. Mt 18:79, or possibly a longer section of the gospel, and some verses of Ps 37, if not the whole psalm.
3. That is to say, no scandal, that is, stumbling-block, can scandalize them or make them stumble. I keep the word "scandal," though its meaning has shifted considerably in current English, because alternatives, like stumbling-block, are so colorless and weak in comparison.
4. See Rom 2:13; Jas 1:22.25.
5. See Gal 5:6.
6. Reading *haurire* instead of *audire*, to hear. There is no support for this at all from the manuscripts. It is simply my hunch that the stenographer misheard *haurire* (which suits the metaphor much better) as *audire*. Just as a "t" between two vowels easily gets reduced in some dialects to a "d" (as in American English), so in other dialects (as in some forms of British English) either consonant in the same position can be reduced to an "r," and "butter" or "better," for example, pronounced "burrer" and "berrer." So *haurire*, with the "h" silent, can be interpreted, rather than heard, as *audire*.
7. "Pressure" is really far too weak a word for *pressura*, which here means affliction. But the

understatement, not to say bathos, of my translation is unavoidable, because as the reader will discover, Augustine is going on to play on the idea of pressing.

8. Reading *non valet pressura* with one manuscript and early edition, instead of *non valde pressura* (don't bother too much about pressure) with other manuscripts and modern editions.

9. See Acts 16:24-25.

10. The answer to the second question is clear: praise of God. Presumably the answer to the first, in Augustine's mind, is "the flesh."

11. The comparison of Job's wife with Eve is a favorite one of Augustine's because Eve tempted Adam, of course. See, for example, *Expositions of the Psalms* 94(93), 10. In going on to say the lady exaggerated Job's sufferings and her own, Augustine is surely being rather unfair to her! A little further reading of the next chapter of the book, to say nothing of the next 36 chapters, would have shown him that, whatever Job may have thought of his wife, he himself could hardly have accused her of exaggeration.

Augustine, and the other Fathers, must of course have read the rest of the book of Job; but in his sermons at least he never extends his comments beyond chapter 2, and in this I doubt if he was exceptional. Gregory the Great's *Moral Reflections on Job* are the exception that only serves to prove the surprising rule, that the Fathers of the Church were unable to swallow the indigestible lesson of this "scandalous" book, or of its fellow "scandal" Ecclesiastes.

12. See Dt 5:22.

13. What lamentable male chauvinism! But of course he still has Eve and Job's wife in mind. And we must remember that in his male chauvinist world, in which women played no direct part at all in public life, or even economic life, the only way as a rule in which they could be wicked was by suggesting wickedness to their husbands, like Lady Macbeth. There was really no occasion for men to try to persuade their wives to be wicked; they just went ahead and were wicked themselves, dragging their wives along with them. As we have remarked before, Augustine was nearly always addressing the men in his sermons, and the more prominent, well-to-do men in his congregations at that. They were the ones who needed his sermons the most.

14. The editors consider there must be some words missing from the text here. But it is equally possible that the . . . was part, so to say, of the sermon. The preacher just refers to the reintegration of the amputated limb, and leaves the question of how it was done hanging in the air.

15. He is using the word loosely for all scripture, insofar as it issues precepts, or lays down principles of behavior.

16. That is, by Christ who is the Truth.

17. See Jn 1:12.

18. By believing and being baptized and becoming sons of God instead of sons of men.

19. See Heb 10:23.

20. That is, we come into this world like one coming into an overnight's lodging on a journey, or even into an airport.

21. See 1 Cor 3:12-15.

22. "Christian times," the times since the conversion of Constantine, were a frequent boast among Christian writers and preachers in the fourth century, including Augustine in his earlier years after his conversion. The pagans and semi-Christians turned the tables on them, however, with the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410. But the "devastation of the world," especially in Africa, had started before that with what they called the Gildonian troubles, the revolt of Count Gildo in the last years of the fourth century.

For the way Augustine changed his attitude over the years to the *tempora Christiana*, the Christian times, see *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* by H. A. Markus (Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition, 1988).

23. See Lk 8:23; Mt 8:24.

24. *Homo cordate*. I am not suggesting that Augustine had read John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. But what he is doing with this phrase, which means "sensible man" or "prudent man," is playing on the word "heart," *cor* in Latin. *Homo cordate* literally means "heartly man." But the heart being for the ancients the seat of thought and of judgment rather than of the emotions, being "heartly"

(hearted) meant having a sound practical (worldly) judgment. Perhaps *cor* in this passage should be translated "spirit." But on consideration it seems best to stick to "heart."

25. He doesn't quote texts foretelling this, but obviously has in mind the so-called eschatological discourse of Jesus, Mk 13 and parallels, and a text like Jn 16:12, *In the world you will have trouble (pressura); but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world.*

26. He is talking of perishing, or not perishing, eternally, the only kind that really matters.

27. See 2 Pt 3:7.12.

28. I don't know if it is significant, but Augustine is all the time referring to Rome as a *civitas*, the common word for city, and never as *urbs*, the special word reserved for Rome alone. He may be deliberately cutting Rome, the city, down to size.

29. Not strictly accurate. Even by the legendary reckoning of these old stories, Rome was founded by Romulus, as Augustine said earlier himself, centuries after Aeneas settled in Latium.

30. Sallust, *Against Catiline* 6:1. So this was Augustine's authority for his inaccuracy. But it is contrary to Virgilian orthodoxy.

31. Virgil, *Aeneid* I, 67-680 Ilium is another name for Troy. "Talismans" translates *penates* which were household gods that I first thought of translating as "godlings." But as Augustine felt it necessary to explain them to his congregation, a remoter word was clearly needed.

32. *Numen erat, an omen*, a much punchier play on words. *Numen*, the numinous, is a somewhat impersonal protective power; the *penates* were *numina*. *Omen* is a foreboding sign, and like the English "foreboding," usually of something calamitous, unless it is specifically qualified as a good omen.

## SERMON 82

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 18:15-18: *IF YOUR BROTHER HAS SINNED AGAINST YOU, REPROVE HIM BETWEEN HIM AND YOURSELF ALONE; AND ON THE WORDS OF SOLOMON (PRV 10:10): ONE WHO WINKS DECEITFULLY WITH THE EYES, HEAPS UP GRIEF FOR MEN, ETC.*

Date: 408<sup>1</sup>

*A speck is the beginning of a beam*

1. Our Lord is warning us against taking no notice of each other's sins; not that you should go poking and prying for things to find fault with, but that you should correct what you see. He was talking, of course, about the sharp eye of the person who doesn't have a beam in his own eye, and so is sharp-sighted enough to remove the speck from his brother's eye.<sup>2</sup> What this means I will now suggest to your graces in a few words. A speck in the eye is anger; a beam in the eye is hatred. So when someone who hates finds fault with someone else for being angry, he is wishing to remove a speck from his brother's eye, but he is hindered from doing so by the beam he is carrying around in his own eye. A speck is the beginning of a beam. I mean, when a beam is born, it's first a speck. Water the speck, and you are coaxing it up into a beam; feed your anger with evil suspicions, and you are coaxing it up into hatred.

*A speck disturbs the eye, a beam pokes it out altogether*

2. However, there's a big difference between the sin of the angry person, and the cruelty of the one who hates someone. After all, we even get angry with our children; could you find anybody, though, who hates children? Among animals too a heifer will sometimes get angry and push away her first calf with a kind of irritation as it sucks, yet she twines her mother's heart around it. The calf seems to irritate its mother as it butts against her; yet if it's not there, she looks for it. And it's the same when we discipline children, we are angry or cross with them to some extent. In fact, so true is it that being angry doesn't necessarily mean hating, that on the contrary not being angry can sometimes be proof of hatred. Suppose a child wants to play in the water of a river where he may be carried away by the current and drowned; if you see him and indulgently let him

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Volume 4: Sermons 94A-147A

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A Translation for the 21st Century

## SERMONS

III/4

(94A-147A)

on the New Testament

*translation and notes*

Edmund Hill, O.P.

*editor*

John E. Rotelle, O.S.A.

New City Press

Brooklyn, New York



## SERMON 105

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL, LUKE 11: 5-13: *WHICH OF YOU WILL HAVE A FRIEND, AND HE WILL COME TO HIM IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, ETC.*

Date: 411<sup>1</sup>

*Christ encourages us to ask*

1. We have all heard our Lord exhorting us, the heavenly teacher and most trustworthy of advisers, the one who encourages us to ask being the same as the one who gives when we ask. We heard him in the gospel encouraging us to ask insistently, and to knock even to the point of bad manners. I mean, by way of an example he put this instance to us: "If any of you had a friend whom you asked for three loaves at night, because another friend of yours had come from the road, and you didn't have anything to set before him; and if he answers that he is now in bed, and his servants<sup>2</sup> with him, and you shouldn't be bothering him with your pleas; but you persevere and carry on knocking, and don't slink off, deterred by shame, but keep it up, compelled by necessity; he will get up, even if not for friendship's sake, certainly because of your ill-mannered insistence, and give you however much you want."

How much, though, did he want? That man wanted no more than three loaves. So at the end of this parable the Lord added an exhortation, and actually prodded and spurred us into asking, seeking, knocking, until we get what we ask for, what we seek, what we are knocking at.<sup>3</sup> He had been using an example in the opposite sense, just as he did with that judge who neither feared God nor respected men, and yet when a certain widow came appealing to him every day, he was beaten by boredom, and gave her unwillingly what he couldn't give out of good will.<sup>4</sup>

Our Lord Jesus Christ, though, who petitions among us and grants requests with the Father, would certainly not have urged us to ask unless he were willing to grant. How ashamed our human inertia should be! He is more eager to give than we are to receive; he is more eager to be merciful than we are to be delivered from misery; and of course, if we are not delivered from misery, miserable shall we remain.<sup>5</sup> You see, it is for our own good that he urges us to do whatever he does urge us to do.<sup>6</sup>

2. Let's wake up, and trust his encouragement, and set our sights on his promises, and rejoice in his gifts. Perhaps, after all, we too have sometimes had a friend coming from the road, and haven't found anything to set before him, and have got it from someone else both for him and for ourselves. I mean, there can't possibly be anyone who hasn't experienced the request of a friend he couldn't gratify; who only then discovered he hadn't got something, when he was obliged to give it.

A friend comes to you from the road, that is from the life of this world, in which all of us are passing along like travelers, and none of us stays put like a landowner, but every one of us is told, *You have had your refreshment, pass on; continue your journey, make room for one who is to come* (Sir 29:27). Or perhaps heaven knows which friend of yours comes tired out from a bad road, that is from a bad life, never yet discovering the truth which would make him happy if he heard and accepted it, but worn out with all the greediness and neediness of the world; he comes to you, as to a Christian, and says, "Make sense of it all for me,<sup>7</sup> make me a Christian." And he asks you questions to which you because of the simplicity of your faith never knew the answers; and there's nothing there with which you can satisfy his hunger, and this makes you realize how needy you are yourself; and while you are wanting to teach, you are obliged to learn; and while you are embarrassed by his questions, and his not finding with you what he was looking for, you are compelled to seek, so that you deserve to find.

*Go on knocking; he wants to give*

3. And where are you to seek? Where else but in the books of the Lord? Perhaps what this man asked about is there in one book or other, but is obscure. Perhaps the apostle states it in one of his letters. He said it in such a way that you can read it but can't understand it. You're not allowed to let the matter drop. The questioner, you see, is pressing you; the rules don't let you in your turn question Paul himself, or Peter, or any of the prophets. That whole household, after all, is already at rest in bed with its Lord, and this world is thick with ignorance (that's the middle of the night), and your friend is hungry and pressing you to give him something. For you, no doubt, simple faith was enough; well, it's not enough for him. Can you just shrug him off? Can you throw him out of the house?

So then, it's on the Lord's own door you must knock, where his household is at rest with him; you must knock by praying, ask, insist. He's not like that friend in the parable, who will only get up and give it to you when he can't stand your racket any longer. He really wants to give; while you are knocking, you haven't yet received. Go on knocking, he wants to give. And he puts off giving what he wants to give, to increase your desire for the gift deferred, else if given at once it might lose its value.

*The meaning of the three loaves*

4. But when you get hold of the three loaves, that is of the food contained in the understanding of the Trinity, you have got both something to live on yourself and something to feed others on. You need no longer dread the stranger coming in from the road, but by welcoming him, you can make him a citizen member of the household.<sup>8</sup> And don't be afraid of finishing the supplies. That bread will never be finished; it will finish off your neediness instead.

It's bread, and it's bread, and it's bread; God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Eternal the Father, coeternal the Son, coeternal the Holy Spirit. Unchanging the Father, unchanging the Son, unchanging the Holy Spirit. Creator, both Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Shepherd and giver of life, both Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Food and everlasting bread, both Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Learn and teach; live and feed others. God, who gives to you, has nothing better to give you than himself. Greedy, what else were you looking for? Or if you are asking for something else, what can be enough for you if God isn't enough for you?

*Faith, hope, and love are gifts of God*

5. But you need to have love, to have faith, to have hope, so that what is given you can taste sweet to you. These also are a threesome: faith, hope, love. These too are gifts of God. I mean, we received faith from him: *Just as God*, he says, *has allotted to each the measure of faith* (Rom 12:3). And we have received hope from the one to whom it is said, *in which you have given me hope* (Ps 119:49). And we have received love from the one of whom it is said, *The love of God has been poured out in our hearts, through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us* (Rom 5:5). These same three, however, are somewhat different from each other;<sup>9</sup> but they are all God's gifts. For *there abide these three, faith, hope, love; but the greatest of these is love* (1 Cor 13:13). Among those loaves, no loaf was said to be greater than the others; but three loaves were simply asked for, and given.

*Another symbolism of faith, hope, and love*

6. Why, here's another trio:<sup>10</sup> *Which of you, when his son asks him for bread, will hand him a stone? Or which of you, when he asks him for a fish, will hand him a snake? Or when he asks him for an egg, will hand him a scorpion? If you therefore, though you are bad, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?* (Lk 11:11-13; Mt 7:9-11).<sup>11</sup>

So again let us consider this trio, and see if perhaps those other three are to be found there, faith, hope, love; but the greatest of these is love. So bring on this trio, bread, fish, egg; the greatest of these is bread. Therefore in this trio we are right to understand bread as love. The reason he contrasted a stone with bread is that hardness is against love.

We can take the fish as being faith. A certain holy man said, and it is my pleasure to say, "Loyal faith is a good fish."<sup>12</sup> It lives in the waves, and is not broken or dissolved by the waves. A loyal faith lives among the trials and tempests of this world; the world rages, faith remains entire. Now observe that snake as the absolute opposite of faith. It was in faith, you see, that the bride was betrothed, who was told in the Song of Songs, *Come from Lebanon, my bride, coming and passing through from the starting point of faith*.<sup>13</sup> The reason she is also betrothed is that faith is the starting point of any betrothal. After all, she is being promised something by the bridegroom, and is tied to him by the faith he promises. Now the Lord opposed a snake to the fish, the devil to faith. That's why the apostle says to this betrothed bride, *I have betrothed you to one husband, to present you to Christ as a chaste virgin; and I am afraid that, just as the serpent led Eve astray by his cunning, so too your ideas may be corrupted from the chastity which is in Christ* (2 Cor 11:2-3); that is to say, which is in faith in Christ. *For Christ*, he says, *to dwell through faith in your hearts* (Eph 3:17). So don't let the devil corrupt faith, don't let him devour the fish.

*Hope can be compared to an egg*

7. There remains hope, which as I see it can be compared to an egg. Hope, you see, hasn't yet reached its object; and an egg is something, but not yet a chick. So quadrupeds give birth to their young, but birds to the hope of their young. So what hope is urging us to is this: to make light of the present and look to the future; forgetting what lies behind, let us stretch out with the apostle to what lies ahead. That's what he says, after all: *But one thing; forgetting what lies behind, stretching out to what lies ahead, I follow with a true aim toward the palm of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* (Phil 3:13-14).

So there is nothing so inimical to hope as looking backward; which means placing one's hope in these things that are slipping by and passing away. Instead it should be placed in things that have not yet been given, but are to be given sometime, and then will never pass away. But as long as the world is dripping with temptations, like the sulphurous rain of Sodom, we must be warned by the example of Lot's wife. She looked back, you see; and where she looked back, there she stuck. She was turned into salt,<sup>14</sup> to season sensible people with her dreadful example.

This is how the apostle Paul speaks of this hope: *For it is by hope that we have been saved. But hope that is seen is not hope; for why should anyone hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it in patience* (Rom 8:24-25). "For why should anyone hope for what he sees?" That's the egg. It's an egg, it's not yet a chick. And it's covered with a shell; it's not seen, because it is covered up; it must be waited for with patience; to come alive, it must warm up.<sup>15</sup> Brace yourself, stretch out to what's ahead, forget what's past. After all, what can be seen is temporal. *Not looking back*, he says, *at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal* (2 Cor 4:18). So stretch

out your hope to those things that are not seen; wait for them, be patient. Don't look behind you. Be afraid of the scorpion for your egg. Notice that it stings with its tail, which it has behind it.

So don't let the scorpion ruin your egg, this world your hope with a poison, if I may so put it, that is adverse insofar as it is backverse.<sup>16</sup> How much the world has to say to you, how much it chatters away behind your back, to make you look round behind you, to make you, that is, place your hope in things present (and not even present; I mean, things that never stay put can't be said to be present<sup>17</sup>); and turn your mind away from what Christ has promised and not yet given, but will give because he is faithful; and so to make you willing to take your rest in a world that is perishing.

*I will bless the Lord at all times*

8. That, you see, is the reason why God mixes some bitter pills into earthly good fortune, to make us seek another sort of good fortune, whose sweet taste is not deceptive. And even these bitter pills the world tries to use, in order to turn you away from your aiming at what lies ahead, and turn you backward again. It's about these very pills of bitterness, these very afflictions that you grumble and say, "Look how everything is going to wrack and ruin in these Christian times."<sup>18</sup> Why all the fuss? God didn't promise me this, that these things won't perish, this isn't what Christ promised me. The eternal one promised eternal things; if I believe, from being mortal I shall become eternal. Why all the fuss, O unclean, worn out world?<sup>19</sup> Why all the fuss? Why are you trying to turn me away from my aim? Though you are passing away, you want to hold on to me; what would you do if you really stayed forever? Is there anyone you wouldn't deceive with your sweetness, if with your bitter flavors you can falsify foodstuffs?<sup>20</sup>

If I have hope, if I hold onto hope, my egg has not been stung by the scorpion. *I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise always in my mouth* (Ps 34:1). Let the world prosper, let the world be turned upside down; *I will bless the Lord* who made the world; come what may, I will bless him. Whether things go well materially, whether they go badly materially, *I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise always in my mouth*. I mean, if I bless when all is well, and blaspheme when things go wrong, I have received the scorpion's sting, I have been bitten and looked back behind me; which God preserve us from. *The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away: as it pleased the Lord, so has it come to pass; may the name of the Lord be blessed* (Job 1:21)

*A heavenly kingdom promised to you*

9. The city that gave us birth in the flesh remains standing, thank God.<sup>21</sup> If only it could be brought to spiritual birth, and pass over with us to eternity! If the city which gave us birth in the flesh does not remain standing, the one which gave us birth in the spirit does. *The Lord builds up Jerusalem* (Ps 147:2). Do

you imagine he nodded off and lost what he had built, or that he let enemies into it by not guarding it properly? *Unless the Lord guards the city, the one who guards it keeps watch in vain* (Ps 127:1). And what city is that? *He neither sleeps nor drowns, he that guards Israel* (Ps 121:4). What is Israel but the seed of Abraham? What is the seed of Abraham but Christ? *And to your seed*, he says, *which is Christ* (Gal 3:16). And what about us? *But you are Christ's; therefore you are the seed of Abraham, heirs according to the promise* (Gal 3:29).

*In your seed*, he says, *shall all the nations be blessed* (Gn 22:18). The holy city, the faithful city, the city wandering over the earth as a stranger, was founded in heaven. O faithful one,<sup>22</sup> do not corrupt your hope, do not mislay your love, gird your loins, go up, raise high your lamps, *wait for the Lord when he comes from the wedding* (Lk 12:35-36). Why panic, just because earthly kingdoms crumble? That's why a heavenly kingdom was promised to you, so that you wouldn't crumble away with the earthly ones. I mean, the eventual disappearance of these has been foretold, foretold without the slightest doubt. We cannot deny, after all, what has been foretold. Your Lord, whom you are waiting for, said to you, *Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom* (Mk 13:8). Earthly kingdoms have their ups and downs; but that man is coming of whom it is said, *And of his kingdom there will be no end* (Lk 1:33).

*End of earthly kingdom*

10. Those who made such a promise to earthly kingdoms were not governed by the truth but were lying in order to flatter. One of their poets brought in Jupiter speaking, and had him say of the Romans:

To these I set no bounds of space or time;  
Dominion without end have I bestowed.<sup>23</sup>

That, obviously, is not the answer that truth gives.<sup>24</sup> This kingdom which you have bestowed without end, O you that have bestowed precisely nothing, is it on earth or in heaven? On earth, of course. And even if it were in heaven, *Heaven and earth shall pass away* (Lk 21:33). What God himself made shall pass away; how much more rapidly what Romulus founded?

Perhaps if we wanted to taunt Virgil about this, and tease him for saying such a thing, he would put up with us to some extent, and say to us, "Yes, I too know this perfectly well; but what was I to do? I used to earn my living by selling words to the Romans, so I had to flatter them by promising something that wasn't true. And yet even here I was canny; when I said 'Dominion without end have I bestowed,' I brought in their Jupiter to say it. I didn't utter a falsehood in my own person, but I imposed the mask<sup>25</sup> of falsehood on Jupiter; just as he was a false god, so was he a lying soothsayer. But do you want to see that I knew all this? In another place, when I didn't bring in Jupiter as a talking stone, but spoke in my own person, I said,

Nor Roman state, and kingdoms doomed to die.<sup>26</sup>

"Observe that I said 'kingdoms doomed to die.' I said that kingdoms were doomed to die, I didn't keep quiet about it." That they would crumble to dust,

he didn't hide, for the sake of truth; that they would remain for ever, he promised out of flattery.

*Look forward to eternal realities*

11. So, brothers and sisters, don't let our spirits fail within us; an end will come to all earthly kingdoms. If this is the end now, God can see. Perhaps, after all, it isn't yet the end, and prompted by a certain weakness, or pity, or misery, that's what we wish, that it isn't yet the end; but does that mean the end will never come? Fix your hopes on God, long for eternal things, look forward to eternal realities. You're Christians, brothers and sisters, we're Christians. Christ didn't come down into the flesh for pleasure's sake. Let us rather tolerate than love our present condition; adversity is straightforward with its punishments, prosperity deceitful with its blandishments. Fear the sea, even when it is a flat calm.

Let's make absolutely sure we don't hear the words *Lift up your hearts* to no purpose. Why place our hearts on earth, when we can see how the earth is being turned upside down? All I can do is urge you to put your hearts where you say you do,<sup>27</sup> and to give an answer for your hope to those who taunt and blaspheme the name of Christian.<sup>28</sup> Don't let anyone by his discontented grumbling deflect you from your expectation of future blessings. All those who blaspheme our Christ because of these disasters are the scorpion's tail. We, though, should lay our egg under the wings of that evangelical hen, who cries out, *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, to that faithless and doomed city, how often have I wished to gather your children together as a hen does her chicks, and you would not!* (Lk 13:34). May it never be said to us, *How often have I wished, and you would not!* That divine hen, you see, is Wisdom. But she took flesh, in order to be on the same level as her chicks. Notice a hen, ruffling her feathers, drooping her wings, clucking in a hoarse, a shaky, a tired, a languid sort of way, in order to be on the same level as her little brood. So let us lay our egg, that is our hope, under the wings of this hen.

*The ruin of Rome attributed to the Christians*

12. Perhaps you have observed how a chicken cuts a scorpion to pieces.<sup>29</sup> If only these blasphemers, then, crawling on the ground, poking out of their holes, stinging in their horrible way, may be cut to pieces and devoured by this hen, and so be transferred into her body and turned into egg! Now they mustn't get angry with me; I may seem to be excited, but I'm not returning curse for curse. We are cursed and we bless, spoken ill of and we intercede.<sup>30</sup>

"But he shouldn't say these things about Rome," people have been saying about me. "Oh, if only he would shut up about Rome!" As though I were hurling taunts, and not rather interceding with the Lord, and in whatever way I can encouraging you. Far be it from me to hurl taunts. May God keep any such thought from my mind, and from burdening my conscience. Didn't we have

many brethren there, don't we still have them? Doesn't a considerable portion of the wandering, pilgrim city of Jerusalem stay there? And hasn't it there suffered temporal losses? But it hasn't lost eternal gains. So what am I saying, when I don't shut up about Rome, other than what they say about our Christ is false, that it's he that has ruined Rome, that gods of stone and wood used to protect Rome? Add the value of bronze; add more, that of silver and gold. *The idols of the nations are silver and gold* (Ps 115:4). He didn't say stone, he didn't say wood, he didn't say earthenware, but what they value highly, *silver and gold*. Yet even silver and gold *have eyes and cannot see* (Ps 115:5). Golden gods and wooden gods differ greatly in value; in having eyes and not seeing they are all of a piece.

There you have the sort of guardians to whom learned men have entrusted Rome, having eyes and unable to see. Or if they could have preserved Rome, why did they perish first themselves? "That's when Rome perished," they say. All the same, they did perish. "It's not they that perished," they answer, "but their images."<sup>31</sup> So how could you expect them to look after your homes, if they couldn't even look after their own images? Some time ago Alexandria lost its gods of that sort. Constantinople, from the moment it was founded to be a great city,<sup>32</sup> indeed lost its original false gods, because it was founded by a Christian emperor; and yet it grew, and is still growing, and remains standing. As long as God wills, it remains. You see, just because I say this, I am not promising even that city eternity. Carthage remains standing in the name of Christ, and once upon a time Celestis was overthrown, because she wasn't celestial, but terrestrial.<sup>33</sup>

*Our people were afflicted in the earthly kingdom,  
but they didn't lose the kingdom of heaven*

13. And what they say just isn't true, that no sooner were the gods destroyed than Rome was captured, was dashed down. It simply isn't true. Those images had already been toppled off their pedestals before, when the Goths were defeated under Rhadagaisus.<sup>34</sup> Remember, brothers, you must remember; it's not long ago, only a few years, think back. All the images in the city of Rome had been toppled. Rhadagaisus, king of the Goths, came with a huge army, much more numerous than Alaric's was. Rhadagaisus was a pagan man, he used to sacrifice to Jupiter every day. The news spread everywhere that Rhadagaisus would never give up the sacrifices. Then all these people started off, "Look, we aren't sacrificing, he is sacrificing, now we who are not allowed to sacrifice have to be conquered by a sacrificer."

God showed that even temporal safety and salvation does not lie in sacrifices of that sort, not even for earthly kingdoms; Rhadagaisus was defeated in a wonderful manner, with the Lord's help.<sup>35</sup> Later on came more Goths, who didn't sacrifice; though they weren't Catholics in their Christian faith,<sup>36</sup> still they were opposed to idols; they came as the foes of idols, and they took the city. They conquered the people who trusted in idols, and still pined for their lost idols, and still longed to sacrifice to their lost idols.

But our people were there too, and were sorely afflicted. But they knew how to say *I will bless the Lord at all times* (Ps 34:1). They were afflicted in the earthly kingdom, but they didn't lose the kingdom of heaven. Indeed, they were made better able to attain it through being schooled in tribulation. And if they didn't blaspheme God in their tribulations, they came out of them like jars intact from the furnace, and were filled with blessings from the Lord.

These blasphemers, though, chasing after earthly things, desiring earthly things, placing their hopes in earthly things, when willy-nilly they lose them all, what will they have left? Where will they be left? Nothing outside, nothing inside; empty coffers, emptier conscience. Where will they find rest, where well-being, where hope? Let them come with us, therefore, let them stop blaspheming God and learn to adore him. Let the stinging scorpions be eaten by the hen, digested by her and changed into her body; let them be tried and tested on earth, so that they may be rewarded with the prize in heaven.

## NOTES

1. The sermon was preached in Carthage in the summer of that year, while the sack of Rome by Alaric was still fresh in everyone's mind, and while Augustine was staying on in the African metropolis after the conference with the Donatists.

2. It's interesting that Augustine should interpret the "children" of the parable as servants; his Latin almost certainly had *pueri*, "boys," like the Vulgate, and this word did often mean servants—as it does to this day in the colonial English of South Africa, where you don't find gardeners and domestics, but garden boys and house boys, no matter what their age may be. The word is so used in the gospels, notably of the centurion's servant: compare Mt 8:6 with Lk 7:2.7. But in our parable here Jesus almost certainly meant children, and was so understood. He wasn't addressing the slave-owning classes; Augustine was.

3. See Lk 11:9-10.

4. See Lk 18:1-8. The grumpy friend and the godless judge are indeed to be contrasted with God. But the kind of example or argument Jesus is using here is more *a fortiori* than *a contrario*.

5. He means forever, in hell.

6. So much neater in the Latin: *ille quod nos hortatur, propter nos hortatur*.

7. See 1 Pt 3:15, to which Augustine's Latin phrase, *Redde mihi rationem*, is rather closer than my free translation.

8. See Eph 2:19.

9. Unlike three loaves, or the three persons of the Trinity.

10. All in the same passage of Luke.

11. According to the New Testament text approved by most editors, Luke only has two things, egg and fish, and Matthew only has two, bread and fish. But in several versions, followed by the Vulgate and accepted as authentic by the Jerusalem Bible, Matthew's bread also crept into the text of Luke. So you could say that that is the text Augustine is following—except that he ends with Matthew's rather colorless conclusion, instead of Luke's much more powerful *How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him*.

This again lends some support to my notion that Augustine (or the Church of Carthage, rather) was using a harmony of the gospels, possibly Tatian's. And it would be this harmony which complemented Luke's duo of egg and fish with Matthew's bread.

12. There is no telling who this holy man was. His saying may include the next sentence as well. My guess is that Augustine was quoting from some Acts of the martyrs, now lost.

13. Sg 4:8, Septuagint. "The starting point of faith" renders "the heights of Amana" in contemporary versions. This *initium fidei* was a key notion for Augustine. Faith is for him the starting point of the quest for understanding, the quest for God. The phrase is to be taken in conjunction with his favorite text, Is 7:9, *Unless you believe, you shall not understand*, which gives rise to Anselm's famous definition of theology as "faith seeking understanding."

14. See Gn 19:26.

15. A neat word-play in Latin: *fervescat ut viviscat*.

16. Augustine here invents a word, *retrarius*, to play on *contrarius*.

17. St Augustine's most sustained meditation on the enigma of time is to be found in the *Confessions*, Book XI. He observes, with justice, that the present doesn't really exist; thus the moment before I tap a key on the typewriter, my doing so is still in the future; the moment I tap it, it is already in the past. So the present is a kind of non-point between past and future. And neither of these really exists either; the past is over and done with; the future isn't yet. There is only one true "is," therefore; that where there is no past or future, but just the timeless, eternal being of him who said *I am who am*.

18. *Christiana tempora*, a common expression at the time for the post-Constantinian era, when the Roman Empire, so rapidly became superficially Christian, and Catholic Christianity became the state religion. In his earlier days Augustine shared the common euphoria about this revolution in the Church's fortunes and in world affairs, often seeing it as the fulfillment of prophecies about "all the ends of the earth turning to the Lord" (Ps 22:27, etc.). But long before the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410, to which he is referring here, he had begun to be skeptical about the divinity that people like Eusebius considered to hedge the Roman state, and to put Rome on a par with Babylon as the epitome of "the earthly city" (the "world" of this sermon), always in conflict with the city of God. See *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, by H. A. Markus (1988, C.U.P.)

19. *O munde immunde*.

20. He seems to have got caught up in the machinery of his own rhetoric here, and to be saying practically nothing at all.

21. Rome, which had not been destroyed by the Goths under Alaric, only occupied and sacked. Quite apart from Augustine's assessment of the Roman state remarked on in note 18, his attitude to the city was always ambivalent. On the one hand he was proud of being a Roman citizen in this great Empire, proud of the Latin culture in which he was steeped. But he was also very consciously an African, and his own metropolis and second city, so to say, where he was preaching this sermon, was Carthage, which had once been Rome's deadly rival. So Rome for him was also the foreign conqueror of his native land.

22. Here, I take it, he is addressing the faithful city, that is the Church, not just a typical member of the congregation, as he often does.

23. Virgil, *Aeneid* I, 278-279.

24. An answer to the consultation of an oracle.

25. This is the proper meaning of *persona*, which in the previous phrase I have translated "person." It was the mask worn by tragic actors. Virgil, the producer of the drama, has imposed this mask on Jupiter, no real god, but just a stage player. It is interesting to see that long before Dante, Christians regarded Virgil with a very special reverence; even Augustine, though his reverence is qualified.

26. *Georgics* II, 498.

27. That is, lifted up to the Lord, in accordance with the response to the invitation, "Lift up your hearts."

28. See 1 Pt 3:15.

29. Augustine, presumably, had observed this.

30. See 1 Cor 4:12-13.

31. The reference is presumably to imperial laws of the past 30 or 40 years, closing pagan temples

and removing the images of the gods, as the image of Victory had been removed from the Senate house.

32. Previously it had been the insignificant city of Byzantium.

33. Caelestis was the common name for the chief goddess of Carthage, the Phoenician Astarte, Ishtar or Tanit, a deity who took basically three forms, those of virgin, mother and crone; the neolithic mother goddess, mother earth, much like Diana (Artemis) of the Ephesians (Acts 19:29).

34. This was in 405. He was defeated by Stilicho, the imperial general (himself a Vandal barbarian), who, after being turned back from Rome, was captured and executed.

35. With the help of famine and disease. Augustine is probably comparing his defeat, mentally, with the discomfiture of Sennacherib before Jerusalem in 701 BC, 2 Kgs 19:35.

36. They were Arians.

## SERMON 105A

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL, LUKE 11:5-13: *WHICH OF YOU  
WILL HAVE A FRIEND? ETC.: ON PRAYER*

*Date: uncertain*

*The giver is all ready to give  
but the petitioner needs to be put right*

1. The holy gospel, which we heard when it was read just now, encourages us to pray. It gives us firm hope that no one who asks, seeks and knocks leaves the Lord's presence empty-handed. He didn't say, you see, that there are some who ask and don't receive, but *Everyone*, he says, *who asks shall receive, and who seeks shall find, and who knocks shall be opened to* (Lk 11:10).<sup>1</sup> And he illustrated the point with a comparison by way of contrast;<sup>2</sup> if a friend comes to a friend, and asks for three loaves because of a guest who has just arrived at his place, and asks at a time when it is a great nuisance to get up and give it to him; and the other answers that he can't give it to him, because he's already gone to bed, and his boys are with him in the bedroom;<sup>3</sup> for all that he doesn't stop asking; *I tell you*, he says, *that not out of friendship but out of the nuisance he is enduring from him, he will get up and give him as many as he has need of* (Lk 11:8). If the one who is overcome by the nuisance you make of yourself doesn't refuse, how can the one who urges you to ask refuse? That's the point of this comparison.

If he doesn't deny, when the man asks for three loaves, that he is his friend, and yet doesn't give it to him out of friendship, but in order not to go on being disturbed, will God who is Three, when we ask him for himself, not give us himself? Well, I don't think that that friend would give his friend three loaves such that one would be white, one brown, one barley.<sup>4</sup>

So because Jesus Christ our God, the only begotten Son of God, has given us the firm hope of obtaining what we ask for by encouraging us to pray, we have to know what we ought to pray for. Is there anyone, after all, who doesn't beg God for things? But you have to take care what you beg him for. The giver is all ready to give, but the petitioner needs to be put right. You get up in the morning and request God that you may get rich. Is that something really important, that God's children ought to ask God for? The reason God has chosen to

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A Translation for the 21st Century

### Part III — Sermons

Volume 8: Sermons 273-305A

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A Translation for the 21st Century

## SERMONS

III/8  
(273-305A)  
on the Saints

*translation and notes*

Edmund Hill, O.P.

*editor*

John E. Rotelle, O.S.A.

New City Press  
Hyde Park, New York

## SERMON 280

## ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYRS PERPETUA AND FELICITY

*Date: uncertain<sup>1</sup>*

*Perpetua and Felicity have received the reward of perpetual felicity*

1. This day, coming round year after year, is a reminder to us, and after a certain fashion represents for us the day on which God's holy servants Perpetua and Felicity, adorned with the garlands of martyrdom, burst into bloom in perpetual felicity, holding onto the name of Christ in the war, and at the same time also finding their own names in the reward. We heard of the encouragement they received in divine revelations, and of their triumph in their sufferings, as it was all being read; and all those things, recounted in such glowing words, we perceived with our ears, and actually saw with our minds; we honored them with our devotion, and praised them with love.

However, a solemn annual sermon is also owed by me<sup>2</sup> at a celebration of such universal devotion. If what I can offer is quite unequal to the merits of these saints, I can still contribute my own enthusiastic feelings to the joy of this great feast. What, after all, could be more glorious than these women, whom men can more easily admire than imitate? But this redounds supremely to the praise of him in whom they believed, and in whose name they ran the race together with faithful zeal, so that according to the inner self they are found to be neither male nor female;<sup>3</sup> so that even as regards the femininity of the body, the sex of the flesh is concealed by the virtue of the mind, and one is reluctant to think about a condition in their members that never showed in their deeds.<sup>4</sup>

So the dragon was trampled on by the blessed Perpetua's chaste foot and victorious tread, when the ladder by which she would go to God was set up and revealed.<sup>5</sup> Thus the head of the ancient serpent, which had been the ruin of woman as she fell,<sup>6</sup> was made into a step for woman as she ascended.

*Our delight in the spectacle of martyrdom very different from the  
delight of the actual spectators*

2. What could be more lovely than this spectacle? What more gallant than this contest? What more glorious than this victory? At that time, when the holy

bodies of the martyrs were exposed to the wild beasts, *the nations were roaring throughout the amphitheater, and peoples meditating vain things. But the one who dwells in the heavens was laughing at them, and the Lord was mocking them* (Ps 2:1.4). Now, however, at this time, the descendants of those whose voices were impiously raging against the flesh of the martyrs, are raising their voices in pious praise of the martyrs' merits.

Nor at that time was the theater of cruelty filled with as great a throng of people to see them killed, as the one that now at this time fills the Church of family piety to do them honor. Every year loving-kindness watches in a religious service what ungodliness committed on one day in an act of sacrilege. They too watched, but with a vastly different intention and attitude. They achieved by their shouts what the wild beasts did not complete with their bites.<sup>7</sup> We, on the other hand, both deplore what was done by the godless, and venerate what was suffered by the godly. They saw with the eyes of flesh sights with which to glut the monstrous inhumanity of their hearts; we behold with the eyes of the heart sights which they were not permitted to see. They rejoiced over the martyrs' dead bodies, we grieve over their own dead minds. They, lacking the light of faith, thought the martyrs liquidated; we, with the clear sight of faith, perceive them crowned. Finally, their shouts of abuse and mockery have been turned into our shouts of admiration and joy.<sup>8</sup> And these indeed are religious and everlasting; while those were impious then, and are of course non-existent now.

*If this life, which the martyrs gave up, is so sweet, what must that life  
be like, for which they exchanged it?*

3. We believe, my dearest friends, and rightly believe, that the martyrs win the best prizes. But if we take a thorough look at the contests they engaged in, we won't be in the least surprised that the prizes are so good. Because, you see, this life, though painful and short-lived, is still so sweet that, while people cannot manage not to die, they still take tremendous pains to avoid dying soon. Nothing can be done to put death away for good, and everything possible is done to put it off for a time. Every soul, clearly, finds the pains of life irksome; and yet even those people who have no hopes of anything, either good or bad, after this life, take the greatest pains to stop all pain being stopped by death.<sup>9</sup>

What about those who either mistakenly imagine a future life after death of false and fleshly delights, or with right faith hope for an inexpressibly tranquil and blissful rest? Don't they also do all they can, and take the greatest care to avoid dying too soon? What else, after all, is the meaning of all the hard work put into obtaining the necessary food, of all the services, whether of medicine or of other attentions which the sick demand, or which are paid to the sick, except to avoid reaching the terminal of death too quickly? And so if the mere deferment of death is valued so highly in this life, for how much should one be prepared to buy the total elimination of death in the next? Such, after all, is the heaven knows what kind of sweetness of this doleful life, such the horror of death implanted in the nature of those living any kind of life, that not even those



people are willing to die, who pass through death to a life in which they cannot die.

*The martyrs think nothing either of death  
or of excruciating pain for the sake of Christ*

4. Therefore it is this very great attachment to living and fear of dying that the martyrs of Christ, with outstanding strength of mind, despise in the sincerity of their love, the certainty of their hope and their *faith unfeigned* (1 Tm 1:5). In the power of these virtues, they turn their backs on the world's promises and threats, and *stretch out to what lies ahead* (Phil 3:13). These virtues climb up to heaven by trampling on the head of the serpent, as it hisses and whispers its various suggestions.<sup>10</sup> In fact, you have triumphed over all lusts, once you have crushed the tyrannous power over you of love of this life, which all lusts serve as its accomplices. Nor is there anything whatsoever you can be held enchained by in this life, if you are not held down by love of life itself.

But it is usual for bodily pains to be associated with the fear of death. Sometimes, I mean, it's the one, sometimes the other that conquers a person. You tell lies when tortured, in order not to die; even when you are on the point of dying, you tell lies in order not to be tortured.<sup>11</sup> The martyrs of Christ conquered them both for the sake of Christ's name and his justice; they feared neither death nor pain. It is the one who lived in them that conquered in them,<sup>12</sup> in order that, as they lived not for themselves but for him,<sup>13</sup> they might not die even when they were dead. He was showing them spiritual delights, so that they would not feel bodily pains, except<sup>14</sup> such as would be enough to test them, not to break them. Where, I mean to say, was that woman, when she was unaware she had been pitched against the savage cow, and when she asked when something was going to happen that had in fact happened already?<sup>15</sup> Where was she? What was it she was seeing, that stopped her seeing these things? What was it she was enjoying, that stopped her feeling these pains? By what love was she taken out of herself, called away by what marvelous spectacle, drunk on what cup?<sup>16</sup> And she was still stuck in the meshes of the flesh, still encumbered with her dying limbs, still weighed down by the perishable body.<sup>17</sup>

What about when the souls of the martyrs have been released from these chains after the labors of their perilous contests, when they have been welcomed and entertained in triumph by their escort of angels, where they are not told, "Carry out what I have ordered," but "Receive what I have promised"? With what enjoyment must they now be feasting in spirit! With what assurance, and how sublimely honored, must they be boasting in the Lord! Who could convey any idea of this by any example taken from this earth?

*The difference between the next life as it is now,  
and as it will be after the resurrection*

5. And in any case, that life which the blessed martyrs enjoy now, while there can be no comparison between it and any felicities or sweetnesses of this world,

represents only a small particle of what is promised, indeed is no more than a consolation for the delay. But the day of recompense is coming, when with bodies restored, the whole person will receive whatever he deserves; when the limbs of that rich man, which were once adorned with temporal purple, will be roasted over eternal fire; although even now he is thirsting in hell for a single drop from the finger of the poor man, who is resting delightfully in the bosom of the just.<sup>18</sup>

Just as there's all the difference in the world, you see, between the joys or woes of those who are dreaming and those who are awake, so too there is a great difference between the torments or the joys of the dead and of those who have risen again. Not that the spirits of the dead are necessarily being deluded, like those of dreamers; but that the rest enjoyed by souls without any bodies is one thing, and the glory and felicity of angels with heavenly bodies quite another, and it is with them that the multitude of the faithful will be equated when they rise again.<sup>19</sup> In that state the glorious martyrs will be resplendent with the special light that distinguishes them, and the bodies in which they suffered unseemly torments, will be turned for them into seemly robes of honor.<sup>20</sup>

*We must not think it a light matter that we, like the martyrs, are  
members of the body of Christ*

6. So then, let us celebrate their feasts, as indeed we are doing, with the utmost devotion, soberly cheerful, gathered in a holy assembly, thinking faithful thoughts, confidently proclaiming their sanctity. It is no small part of imitation, to rejoice together in the virtues of those who are better than we are. They are great, we are little; but *the Lord has blessed the little with the great* (Ps 115:13). They have gone ahead of us, they tower over us like giants. If we are not capable of following them in action, let us follow in affection; if not in glory, then certainly in joy and gladness; if not in merit, then in desire; if not in suffering, then in fellow feeling; if not in excellence, then in our close relationship with them.

It should not seem a small matter to us, that we are members of the same person's body as they are too, even though we cannot compare with them. *Because if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; so too, when one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it* (1 Cor 12:26). Glory be to the head, by which consideration is given to the hands above and to the feet below. Just as that one man laid down his life for us all,<sup>21</sup> so the martyrs too imitated him, and laid down their lives for their brothers and sisters; and in order that this bumper crop of Christian peoples might spring up like sprouting seeds, they watered the earth with their blood.<sup>22</sup>

So we too are the fruit of their toil. We admire them, they are sorry for us. We congratulate them, they pray for us. They strewed their bodies like garments on the road, when the colt carrying the Lord was led into Jerusalem; let us at least cut branches from the trees, pluck hymns and praises from the holy scriptures, and offer them in a joint expression of rejoicing. At least we are all

in attendance upon the same Lord, all following the same teacher, accompanying the same leader, joined to the same head, wending our way to the same Jerusalem, pursuing the same charity, and embracing the same unity.

### NOTES

1. After Saint Cyprian, these two martyrs and their companions were the most venerated martyrs of Africa. They suffered in 203 during a persecution instituted by the African Emperor Septimius Severus, on 7 March. An account of their martyrdom will be found in Butler's *Lives of the Saints* under 6 March, since their feast was pushed back a day by the intrusion some centuries later of the bulkier figure of Saint Thomas Aquinas. But in the present calendar they are now back on their rightful date, as Thomas has been moved to 28 January.

Butler's account reproduces very thoroughly their *Passio*, which was in all probability edited by Tertullian. It is a document of quite extraordinary interest, because it was put together by a friend and eyewitness, who for most of it simply quotes Perpetua's own account of her arrest and imprisonment with four other young catechumens, Felicity, a slave, and three young men. To this account, which includes several visions she was granted while in prison, is added that of one of her companions, Saturus, who was the catechist in charge of the young catechumens, and who baptized them in prison. The Latin text of the *Passio* is to be found in Migne's *Patrologia Latina* III, as an appendix to Tertullian's works.

Allusions in the sermon to the *Passio* will be explained in the footnotes, but perhaps a little more information would be helpful here. Perpetua was a young married woman of good family, 22 years old, mother of an infant boy whom she was sometimes permitted to suckle in prison. She had to resist the tearful pleas of her father, not a Christian, to do what the law required, and offer the sacrificial incense before a statue of the Emperor. Felicity, a slave, was eight months pregnant when they were all arrested, and was terrified she would not be able to join them in their martyrdom, as pregnant women condemned to death could not be executed until they had given birth. So if she hadn't given birth by the time they were due to appear in the amphitheater, she would find herself dying in the company of common criminals, and not of her fellow Christians. Accordingly they all prayed very fervently for her, and their prayers were answered, and she gave birth prematurely to a baby girl, who was adopted by a Christian woman.

While no date or place is suggested for the sermon, the rather elaborate style inclines me to date it about 400. The martyrs suffered in Carthage, but their popularity was such that their feast was celebrated universally, and the sermon is as likely to have been preached in Hippo Regius as anywhere else. See note 2.

2. I think this may well indicate that he was preaching in his own Church; a *sermo sollemnis* can hardly be said to have been owed by him anywhere else, unless—as was often the case when he visited other churches—he had promised one. But nothing has been said here about such a promise.

3. See Gal 3:28; Eph 3:16.

4. Their courage gave the lie to "the weakness of their sex"—a thoroughly sexist sentiment. But it is one Perpetua at least would have shared, since in one of her visions she is put into the arena to fight a huge Egyptian (the devil; but why in the guise of an Egyptian? Perhaps they had recently been having the Exodus story read and explained to them). In preparation for the bout she is changed into a man, and proceeds to defeat the Egyptian with what sounds exactly like *karate* techniques: "I kept on striking his face with my heels."

5. In her first vision Perpetua saw a golden ladder reaching into heaven, with all sorts of fearful instruments of torture on either side, so that it functioned rather like a gauntlet to be run. Saturus

went up first, and then beckoned to her to follow. There was a dragon at the foot of the ladder, but it meekly lowered its head, and let her tread on it as her first step in climbing the ladder.

6. See Gn 3:1-5. I treat this as a general statement about "woman"; but it could also be translated as about "the falling woman," Eve, and "the ascending woman," Perpetua.

7. An allusion to the fact that those martyrs who were not in fact killed outright by the wild animals, and they included both the women, were dragged to the side of the arena to be dispatched by gladiators.

8. *Denique illorum insultatio facta est nostra exultatio.*

9. No euthanasia movement in those days! But he exaggerates; suicide was regarded by many pagans, according to the ancient Roman ethos, as an honorable way out.

10. A reference again to Perpetua's dream.

11. Here there occur two sentences which I cannot make head or tail of. I suspect they started as scribbles in the margin of a manuscript, which then got transferred to the text, probably incorrectly. Here they are: *Verum dicit, non ferendo tormenta, ne pro se mentiendo torqueatur. Sed superet horum quilibet in mentibus quibuslibet.* You tell the truth, not by enduring torments (perhaps the copyist incorporating the scribble into the text added the "not"), in order not to be tortured by telling lies for yourself. But let whichever you like of these (these fears?) overcome in the minds of whoever you like. Make sense of it who can.

12. Word play: *Vicit in eis qui vixit in eis.* We could get a similar effect in English with "live" and "love": it is the one who lived in them that loved in them. For the allusion, see Gal 23:20.

13. See 2 Cor 5:15; Rom 14:7-8.

14. Supplying *nisi*, which appears to have dropped out of the text.

15. Perpetua and Felicity were exposed to a mad cow, which tossed them both, injuring Felicity badly. Perpetua came to her help, and then asked, as if in a dream, when they were going to be given to the cow. In her visions in prison she had been shown scenes of paradise.

16. See Ps 23:5; 36:8.

17. See Wis 9:15.

18. See Lk 16:19-24.

19. See Lk 20:36.

20. The comparison of the experience of the deceased before and after the resurrection of the dead to the difference between dreaming and waking is very striking, and reveals how thoroughly non-Platonist Augustine really was, when left to his own originality.

21. See Jn 10:15.

22. A pious commonplace borrowed from Tertullian.

## NOTES

1. For background, see Sermon 280, note 1. There is no reason to suppose that this sermon, any more than Sermon 280, was preached anywhere else but in Augustine's own diocese of Hippo Regius. I would be inclined to date it a little later than that sermon—any time between 405 and 410.

2. Reading *in feminis* instead of the text's *in feminas*, which I take to be either a scribal error or an editorial misprint.

3. See 2 Cor 11:2.

4. See Gn 3:1-6.

5. Supplying an *ut* which seems to have dropped out of the text before *seminaret*; to read now *qui eas ut seminare, semetipsum exinanivit*.

6. See Sermon 280, note 4.

7. See Ex 20:12.

8. Wordplay: *ut cuius verba contempserat, saltem verbera condoleret*. When the prisoners were brought before the magistrate, Perpetua's father tried to pull her down from the platform on which they were paraded, and on the magistrate's instructions he was slashed across the face and pushed away by one of the court attendants.

9. See Gn 3:16.

10. See Sermon 280, note 1. "A month prematurely" is a very bald translation of his more elaborate paradox: *immature mense maturus*, which I am totally at a loss how to reproduce in English.

11. That is, their felicity.

12. Six altogether, I think; three other male catechumens and Saturus their catechist.

## SERMON 282

## ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYRS PERPETUA AND FELICITY

Date: uncertain<sup>1</sup>

*Perpetua and Felicity are the names of two martyrs,  
but the reward of all*

1. Today we are celebrating the feast of two holy martyrs, who were not only outstanding for their surpassing courage when they suffered, but who also, in return for such a great labor of piety, signified by their own names the reward awaiting them and the rest of their companions. Perpetua, of course, and Felicity are the names of two of them, but the reward of them all. The only reason, I mean, why all the martyrs toiled bravely for a time by suffering and confessing the faith in the struggle, was in order to enjoy perpetual felicity. So it was by an ordination of divine providence that these women had to be, and were, not only martyrs, but also the closest companions, in order to set the seal of their glory on one single day, and to leave posterity with a joint festivity to celebrate.

By the example, you see, of their glorious struggle they encourage us to imitate them; and likewise by their names they bear witness to the indivisible gift we are going to receive. May they hold on tight to each other, bind themselves together. We are not hoping for one without the other. Perpetual, after all, is not much good if there is no felicity there; and felicity fades away if it is not perpetual. These few words must suffice for the time being upon the names of the martyrs to whom the day is dedicated.

*They overcame the enemy, notwithstanding  
the drawbacks both of their sex and their status*

2. As regards the women themselves, whose names these are, as we heard when their *Passion* was read, as we know from what we have committed to memory, these two of such strength of character and merit were not only women, they were wives as well.<sup>2</sup> And one of them was also a mother,<sup>3</sup> so that to the weakness of her sex might be added feelings less capable of endurance; thus the enemy would assail them from every quarter, and fondly suppose that as they would not be able to endure the hard, cruel burdens of persecution, they would

give in to him straightaway and very soon be his to gloat over. They, however, being watchfully and firmly on guard in the strength of the inner self, scotched all his crafty tricks, and broke the force of all his attacks.

*Though there were men among their companions in martyrdom, it is only these two women whose names mark this feast day*

3. In this remarkable and glorious company there were men too who were martyrs, very brave men who conquered by their sufferings on the same day; and yet they haven't stamped their names on this day. The reason this has happened is not that the women were ranked higher than the men in the quality of their conduct, but that it was a greater miracle for women in their weakness to overcome the ancient enemy, and that the men in their strength engaged in the contest for the sake of perpetual felicity.

### NOTES

1. See Sermon 280, note 1, and Sermon 281, note 1. I would date this short sermon later than both those; say between 415 and 420.

2. *Non solum feminae, sed etiam mulieres*; what he primarily means is that they lacked the honorable status of virgins. *Mulier* in his Latin meant more than "woman"; it meant in particular "non-virgin." Whether Felicity, being a slave, could properly be called a wife, I do not know. But presumably the Church, even if not the civil law, accepted the faithful union of slaves as genuine marriages.

3. Perpetua; while Felicity was, as we would now say, an expectant mother.

## SERMON 283

ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYRS OF MARSEILLES

Date: 414<sup>1</sup>

*Against pleasure continence is needed; against pains, patience*

1. Let us by all means admire the courage of the holy martyrs in their sufferings; but in such a way that we proclaim the grace of God. They themselves, after all, certainly did not wish to be praised in themselves, but in the one to whom it is said, *In the Lord shall my soul be praised*. Those who understand this are not proud; they ask shyly, they receive joyfully; they persevere, they don't lose any more what they have received. Because they are not proud, they are gentle; and that's why, after saying *In the Lord shall my soul be praised*, he added, *Let the gentle hear, and be glad* (Ps 34:2). Where would feeble flesh be, where would maggots and rottenness be, unless what we have been singing were true: *My soul will submit itself to God, since it is from him that my patience comes* (Ps 62:5)? Now the virtue the martyrs had, in order to endure all the ills inflicted on them, is called patience.

You see, there are two things by which people are either drawn or driven into sin—pleasure and pain; pleasure draws, pain drives. Against pleasures continence is needed; against pains, patience. This, after all, is how the suggestion is put to the human mind that it should sin: sometimes it's told, "Do it, and you will get this"; while sometimes it's, "Do it, or you will suffer this." A promise leads the way to pleasure, a threat the way to pain. So it's in order to get some pleasure, or to avoid suffering pain, that people sin. That's why against these two tempters, of which one works through smooth promises, the other through terrible threats, God too has been good enough both to make promises, and to inspire terror; promising the kingdom of heaven, terrifying with the punishments of hell.

Pleasure is sweet, but God is sweeter. Temporal pain is bad, but much worse is eternal fire. You have something to love instead of the world's loves, or rather of worthless loves;<sup>2</sup> you have something to fear, in place of the world's terrors.

4. Augustine is being inaccurate here. Zachary, not being the High Priest, never entered the holy of holies. He entered the sanctuary, or holy place, which only priests of the sons of Aaron were allowed to enter, where the altar of incense was to be found, in front of the curtain or veil that hid the holy of holies.

5. Augustine's text, like the Latin Vulgate, together with many fifth century Greek manuscripts, attributed this blessing to the angel as well as to Elizabeth. Perhaps this indicates how early the prayer "Hail Mary" took shape, so that it was influencing the copyists. Augustine has to explain Mary being called "blessed among *mulieres*," since in the Latin of his day *mulieres* were precisely distinguished from *virgines*.

6. See 1 Sm 15:30.35.

7. See 1 Sm 16:7.

8. I do not know how widespread, or how ancient, the opinion was that Mary had made a vow of virginity. The inference, from her question to the angel, that she had done so, is not as necessary as Augustine makes out. After all, it is universally accepted, that she conceived from the moment of the annunciation, from the moment she said, *Be it done to me according to your word* (Lk 1:38). So the angel's words, *Behold you will conceive* (Lk 1:31), may well have conveyed, in Aramaic, the idea, "You are about to conceive now." In that case her question would be understandable, even if she had taken no vow of virginity.

## SERMON 292

ON THE BIRTHDAY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST  
IN WHICH HE ARGUES WITH THE DONATISTS

Date: 399<sup>1</sup>

*Why we only celebrate the birthday of John the Baptist  
and not those of other saints*

1. Today's solemn occasion calls for a solemn sermon to meet such great expectations. So with the Lord's assistance I will serve you with what he gives me, always bearing in mind the service required of me by my office. This requires us<sup>2</sup> to speak, not as masters or teachers, but as servants or ministers; not to students, but to fellow students, because not, either, to servants but to fellow servants. In fact, we all have just one master, whose school is on earth, and whose magisterial chair is in heaven. It was as his forerunner that John was born, whose birthday according to tradition was today and is celebrated today. We have received this tradition from our ancestors, we hand it on to our posterity with a devotion we hope they will imitate. So it's the birthday of John, not the evangelist, but the Baptist, that we are celebrating today.

Having got that clear, we are faced with a question that should not be ignored: why we celebrate the birthday on which John came forth from the womb, rather than that of any of the apostles or martyrs or prophets or patriarchs. If we are asked this question, how shall we answer it? As far as I can see, the reason that occurs to my very mediocre powers is this: the Lord's disciples were born, and grew up till they reached years of maturity, and then were co-opted into discipleship; they adhered to the Lord in faith later on, but none of them performed service for the Lord by his very birth. Let's also record the prophets, call to mind the patriarchs; they were born as human beings, and filled by the Holy Spirit when they grew up, they prophesied about Christ; they were born in order to prophesy later on. With John, though, it was his very birth that prophesied about the Lord Christ, when he greeted him newly conceived in the womb.<sup>3</sup>

*Why John was not one of Christ's disciples, but had disciples of his own*

2. Having solved that problem to the best of our ability, let's tackle another, according to the powers granted us by the Lord. You see, another question

presents itself, a rather more obtrusive one as it seems to me, and harder to examine; so your attentiveness will be a great help to me, and your prayers to the Lord on behalf of my scanty capabilities. Here we have this John, so pre-eminent in grace that, as we've said, he even greeted the Lord from the womb, not by speaking but by leaping; his grace in response to God already evident, at a time when his flesh was still enclosed in flesh; so this John, we find, was not among the Lord's disciples, but we find instead that he, like the Lord, had disciples.<sup>4</sup>

What can this mean? Who is this man? Such a great man, who can such a great man be? How great must such a great man be! Yet he didn't follow the Lord among his disciples, and he had disciples following him; heaven forbid I should say against the Lord, but still as it were apart from the Lord. Christ had disciples, John had disciples. Christ was teaching, John was teaching. What more must I say? John was baptizing, Christ was baptizing. There's more I can say here about baptism: Christ was baptized by John. Where now are those people who puff themselves up about the ministry of baptism with such swollen, such aggressive arrogance?<sup>5</sup> Where are those voices, devoid of humility, lifted up in pride, "I'm the one who baptizes, I'm the one who baptizes"? What would you have said if you had been worthy to baptize Christ?

Here now, as your holinesses will observe, the main cause begins to be evident and to loom up, why not only had Christ to be sent by the Father, but John also had to be sent ahead by Christ.<sup>6</sup> John was sent first, but in the way a magistrate is preceded by his minions. Christ was created as a man later, but as God Christ created John. So John was indeed a perfect man, and one of such outstanding grace that the Lord himself said about him, *Among those born of women nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11). So this uniquely great man recognized the greatness of the Lord in a tiny unborn infant; a human being, he recognized God coming as a human being. If, after all, among those born of women, that is among human beings, nobody had arisen greater than John the Baptist, anyone who is greater than John the Baptist must be not only a human being, but also God. So it was right for this uniquely great man both to have his own disciples and with his disciples to acknowledge Christ as the master and teacher of them all. What greater witness, after all, could he have borne to the truth, than by humbling himself to acknowledge one whom he could have envied and rivaled?

He could have been believed to be the Christ, and he refused to be; he could have been reckoned to be the Christ, and he refused to be. People said, when they were mistaken about him, "Isn't this perhaps the Christ?"<sup>7</sup> He answered that he was not, so that he might remain what he was. That's the way, in fact, that Adam fell, and lost what he was, because he grabbed at being what he was not.<sup>8</sup> That was remembered by this great man, this least of men, though, in comparison with the little Christ.<sup>9</sup> He knew this, he called it to mind and didn't forget it, because he was aiming to receive what Adam had lost.<sup>10</sup> So this man, as I said, the great John, to whom the Lord gave such a testimonial, whom Truth itself commended to us by saying, *Among those born of women there has not*

*arisen a greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11), could have been believed to be the Christ, or rather was already believed to be the Christ by those who were misled by the greatness of his grace.<sup>11</sup> And they would die in that mistaken error, unless they were corrected by his confessing the truth. So he answered people who were thinking like that, and said, *I am not the Christ* (Jn 1:20). As though to say, "Certainly it's to my credit that you are making this mistake; and certainly by thinking so, you are adding to my renown. But I must acknowledge who I really am, so that the one who is the Christ may pardon you for making it." If, you see, he were falsely thought to be what he was not, he would be cut off by the one who truly was the Christ.<sup>12</sup>

*Christ's baptism by John a lesson in humility*

3. So John was sent ahead, in order to baptize the humble Lord. The Lord, you see, wanted to be baptized for humility's sake, not because of any iniquity. Why was the Lord Christ baptized? The Lord Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, why should he be baptized? Discover why he was born, and there you will discover why he should be baptized. There, I mean to say, you will discover the way of humility, which you cannot take with a proud foot; which you must step out along with a humble foot, or you will never be able to reach the heights to which it leads. He was baptized for your sake, having come down from heaven for your sake.

See how great a one it was who became so small: *Who since he was in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal to God*. The Son's equality with the Father, after all, was not a matter of robbery, but of nature. If John had wished to be regarded as the Christ, that would have been robbery on his part. So, *he thought it no robbery to be equal to God*. I mean, he was so, and without robbery was so; he was born coeternal of the eternal. All the same, *he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant* (Phil 2:6-7), that is, taking the form of a man. *Who while<sup>13</sup> he was in the form of God, and had not received the form of God; so, while he was in the form of God, he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant*. Thus he took on what he was not, without losing what he was. He remained God, assumed the man. He took on the form of a servant, and became the God-man, the God by whom the man was made.

So take note, then, of what divine majesty, what power, what sublimity, what equality with the Father, came for our sakes to the putting on of a servile form; and learn from such a tremendous master this way of humility; since it was more remarkable that he should be willing to become a man, than that he should be willing to be baptized by a man.

*Why he wished to be baptized by a man*

4. So John, I repeat, baptizes Christ, the servant the Lord, the voice the Word. Remember, after all, *I am the voice of one crying in the desert* (Jn 1:23); and remember that *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14). So John,

I repeat, baptizes Christ, the servant the Lord, the voice the Word, the creature the creator, the lamp the sun; the sun, that is, which made this sun, the sun of which it is said, *The sun of justice has risen for me, and there is healing in its wings* (Mal 4:2). About it the godless, when they repent too late at the end, at the judgment of God, are going to say, *What profit was pride to us? Or what benefit did the boastfulness of riches confer on us? All these things have passed away like a shadow*—and with the shadows, those who have chased after shadows. So, they say, *we strayed from the way of truth, and the light of justice did not shine upon us, and the sun did not rise for us* (Wis 5:8-9.6). Christ did not rise for those, by whom Christ was not acknowledged. That sun of justice, unclouded, knowing no night, does not rise for the wicked, does not rise for the godless, does not rise for unbelievers. Because every day he makes this bodily sun in the sky rise upon the good and the wicked.<sup>14</sup>

So, as I said, the creature baptized the creator, the lamp the sun, and by doing so the Baptizer did not push himself forward, but submitted himself. I mean, he said to the one who came to him, *Are you coming to me to be baptized? It is I who ought to be baptized by you* (Mt 3:14). A great confession, and a sound profession of humility by the lamp. If this had pushed itself forward against the sun, the wind of pride would very soon have blown it out. So this is what the Lord foresaw, what the Lord taught by his baptism. Such a great one wished to be baptized by such a small one; to explain it in a word, the savior by one needing to be saved. John, I mean, had perhaps remembered, great though he was, some sickness or other of his.<sup>15</sup> Why else, after all, *It is I who ought to be baptized by you*? Certainly the Lord's baptism means salvation, because *salvation is from the Lord* (Ps 3:8). *For vain is the salvation coming from men* (Ps 60:11). So why, *It is I who ought to be baptized by you*, if he had no need of any sort of cure? But in the Lord's own very humility there is a marvelous medicine; one was baptizing, the other healing.

You see, if *Christ is the savior of all men, especially of the faithful* (1 Tm 4:10)—it is the apostle's judgment, and a true one, that Christ is the savior of all men—then nobody may say, "I have no need of a savior." If you say this, you are not bowing humbly to the doctor's orders, but perishing in your disease. If he's the savior of all men, then of John too; it isn't the case, after all, that John wasn't a man. A great man, certainly, but still a man. Christ is the savior of all men; and so John acknowledges his savior. Nor is it the case that Christ was not John's savior. That's not what he says to him when he humbly admits, *It is I who ought to be baptized by you*. To this the Lord replies, *Leave it now, let all justice be fulfilled* (Mt 3:15). What is *all justice*? It was in the form of humility that he was urging justice upon us; the heavenly master and true Lord was urging justice upon us above all in the form of humility. That he was baptized, you see, was a matter of humility; and that's why, as he was about to do what was a matter of humility, he said, *Let all justice be fulfilled*.

*Donatist misconceptions about baptism*

5. He foresaw that many people were going to puff themselves up about the ministry of baptism, and to say, "It's I who baptize," and, "The sort of person I am as I baptize, is the sort I make the person whom I baptize."<sup>16</sup>

How can you prove this?

"I can prove it," he says.

On what evidence?

"That of the gospels," he says.

So let's hear goodness knows which new evangelist against the ancient understanding of baptism. So what evidence do you bring from the gospels, to prove that the sort of person you are is the sort into which you make the person whom you baptize?

"Because it's written," he says, "*A good tree produces good fruit. I'm reciting what's written, I'm bringing the gospel: A good tree produces good fruit, a bad tree produces bad fruit*" (Mt 7:17).

I recognize the gospel; but you, as far as I can see, don't recognize yourself. And to help me put up with you patiently for a while, explain what you are saying; put me down, for the time being, as not having understood. Tell me the bearing of this evidence, what help it is in solving this kind of question about baptism.

"The good tree," he says, "is the good baptizer. The good tree," he says—it's what they all say—"the good tree," he says, "is the good baptizer; it's good fruit, the one who is baptized by him. It's then, you see, that the fruit will be good, if he is a good tree."

What do you say about Christ and John? Wake up, bestir yourself, the splendor of the transparent truth is brushing across your eyes. See what was prearranged before us, read the gospel; John baptized Christ. Are you going to say, John's the tree, Christ the fruit? Will you call the creature the tree, the creator the fruit? That's why the Lord Christ wished to be baptized by John: not in order to be rid of iniquity through baptism, but in order to shut iniquity's mouth. Just look: the one who baptizes is the inferior; the one who is baptized—am I going to say he's better? Well, perhaps this is too obvious a case for me.<sup>17</sup> Come back to mere human beings, see where both are just human beings. Ananias baptized Paul.<sup>18</sup> Paul was better, greater than Ananias. The fruit is never greater or better than the tree. The tree, after all, produces the fruit, it isn't produced by the fruit.

*The way in which the Donatists equivalently come in Christ's name, saying, "I am the Christ"*

6. Can't you see what you're arrogating to yourself? The Lord himself said, *Many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ* (Mt 24:5). Many have come in the name of Christ, straying and leading astray; we've never heard anyone saying, "I am the Christ." Innumerable heretics have come, all in the name of Christ, that is, they have come cloaked in the name of Christ, they have come,

whitewashing a mud wall with a splendid name; and we haven't heard any of them saying, "I am the Christ." So what then? Didn't the Lord know what he was predicting? Or was he not rather, for a better understanding of hidden treasures, stirring us up from sleep to prize the secret open, to start investigating and knocking, so that what has been covered and roofed over might be opened up, and with the roof opened up, we might be let down to the Lord, so that like that paralytic, we might be privileged to be healed by the Lord?<sup>19</sup>

Yes, we certainly do find these people saying, "I am the Christ," not in these very words, but what is worse, in their deeds. Not with the effrontery of these words. Who would listen to them, after all? Who would be taken in and admit such foolish people to their ears and hearts? If the one who was about to baptize them said, "I am the Christ," they would turn away from him, abandon the man's blatant arrogance, seek instead the grace of God. So he doesn't say, just like that, "I am the Christ." But since there's another way of saying, "I am the Christ"—see how it's done. It's Christ who heals, Christ who cleanses, Christ who justifies; man doesn't justify. What is it to justify? To make just; as to mortify is to make dead, to vivify to make alive, so to justify is to make just.

And here comes some baptizer or other, from the sidelines, not entering through the door, but climbing over the fence, not as the shepherd and watchman, but as a thief and a robber;<sup>20</sup> from the sidelines he says, "I am the one who baptizes."

If you mean as minister, I'm quite ready to say the same. But don't add anything; *anything more than that is from the evil one* (Mt 5:37). And yet he does add something, he doesn't hesitate. What does he add? "I'm the one who justifies, it's I that make just." That, you see, is the meaning of, "I am the good tree; let anybody who wishes to be good fruit be born of me."

Now just listen for a moment, if you've got any sense;<sup>21</sup> just a few words for you, and clear enough, if I'm not mistaken. So it's you that justify, is it, you that make people just? In that case, I say,<sup>22</sup> let the one you justify believe in you. Tell him, have the audacity to say, "Believe in me," since you don't hesitate to say, "You are justified by me."

He's worried, he dithers, he makes excuses. "After all," he says, "what's the need for me to tell him, 'Believe in me' "? What I tell him is "Believe in Christ."

You hesitated, you had your doubts; you were prepared to come down a bit to our level. You admitted to something, which may be the making of you yet. You said something right, from which the other things you got wrong can be corrected. Now listen not to me, but to yourself. I mean, you certainly haven't got the audacity to say, "Believe in me."

"God forbid," he says.

And yet you do have the audacity to say, "I justify you." Listen and learn, because the reason you haven't got the audacity to say, "Believe in me," is the reason you oughtn't to have the audacity to say, "I justify you."

The apostle is talking, to whom you will surrender, whom, whether you like it or not, you will submit to. I mean, it isn't to the apostle as a man, but to the one of whom the apostle says, *Or do you wish to experience the one who is*

*speaking in me, Christ?* (2 Cor 13:3). So listen, not to the apostle, but to Christ speaking through the apostle. *To the person that believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as justice* (Rom 4:5). Pay close attention, all of you please, I beg you. Notice how plain the matter is, how well and truly out in the open: *To the person that believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as justice*. Whoever believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, who makes a godly person out of the ungodly; so whoever believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, who makes just the one who was ungodly, his faith is counted as justice.

Now say, if you dare, "I justify you." Notice how I've answered you from the apostle: If you justify me, I will believe in you; because *to the person that believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as justice*. Do you justify me? I will believe in you. If it's you, I mean, that justify me, I will be the person that believes in the one who justifies me, that is, who justifies the ungodly; I can believe without a qualm, because my faith is counted as justice. So if you haven't got the audacity to say "I justify you"—sorry, I've got that wrong; if you haven't got the audacity to say, "Believe in me," beware of saying any longer, "I justify you." Lost soul, find yourself, in order not to lose both me and you.

*The right way of understanding the text about the tree and the fru*

7. Because as regards the point you wanted to make about the tree and the fruit, I will use an example or two to make a point in my turn, so that you may learn how to understand properly what it says, *A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit* (Mt 7:17). I, you see, understand it in the same way as the Lord himself explains it. What does *A good tree produces good fruit* mean? *A good man from the good treasure of his heart brings out good things, and a bad man from the bad treasure of his heart brings out bad things* (Mt 12:35). He put trees for persons, treasure for actions. As a person is, such are the actions he has. If he is a good man, he has good actions; if he's a bad man, he has bad actions; a good man can't have bad actions, nor a bad man have good actions. What could be more obvious, what more limpidly clear, what plainer?

Now, however, you are making yourself as the baptizer the good tree, and the fruit you are making the one you baptize; so that as you are, such is he. Heaven preserve him from that! And see how perverse your understanding is. There is someone among you,<sup>23</sup> or there once has been, who's an adulterer, even if not generally known.

"But what I don't know," he says, "doesn't contaminate me."

That's not what I'm dealing with; it's another question. I want to say something about baptism, because that's what we've undertaken. There's this secret adulterer; if secret, then a sham; not a sham adulterer, but a real adulterer, a sham as chaste. So this man who's an adulterer and a sham, and all the more a sham, because he's not generally known; because if he commits adultery openly, he isn't a sham any more. So this man who's an adulterer is assuredly shunned by the Holy Spirit. The



sentence passed is certainly quite unambiguous: *The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee from the pretense* (Wis 1:5). So since this adulterer is so in secret, he does of course baptize. There you are; I see a person baptized by a secret adulterer; he is born as fruit; where is the good tree? He's baptized, he's innocent, the forgiveness of sins is accomplished in him. So the ungodly has been justified, good fruit has been born; I'm asking, from what tree?

Say it, answer me: "That tree is the secret adulterer, it's a bad tree."

If this person's the fruit of that tree, he's bad fruit. It's the Lord's own judgment: *A bad tree produces bad fruit*. You will be bound to answer, in order to stand by the goodness of this fruit, that he wasn't born of that tree. After all, just because you don't know it's a bad tree, it doesn't mean it isn't bad; in fact it's all the worse, the less it's known about. What ensures its being less known about, you see, is the incorrigible cunning with which the man hides his actions. Because if he were committing adultery openly, he would at least be curable by confession. It's the worst possible kind of tree, and yet, lo and behold, its fruit is good. Born from where? Or perhaps not born?

"Yes, born," you say.

I ask, where from? What are you going to say? Where is this person born from?

The only thing he can possibly say is, "From God." I don't know if he's going to say anything else, but "From God." If he said this about everybody, and didn't, while he's a bad tree, by pretending make himself out to be a good one, and so make himself all the worse, he would say about all of them that they are born of God. For this he has the clearest support of the gospel; *He gave them power to become children of God, those who are born, not of the flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of the man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God* (Jn 1:12-13).

So come back to this person: is he born of God?

"Yes, of God."

Why this one in particular of God?

"Because good fruit cannot be born of a bad tree. A chaste baptizer is a good tree, he isn't a sham; a genuinely chaste man has baptized, good fruit comes from a good tree."

But look, this person too is good fruit; what sort of tree was he born from? Say from a bad one, if you dare.

"I dare not," he says.

So he too is from a good one?

"Yes, from a good one."

From what good one?

"From God."

What about that other person?

"From a chaste man."

Just concentrate a little; let's understand what we are saying. This one, baptized by a chaste man, is born good fruit from a good tree, that is from a good man. That one, baptized by a secret adulterer, from a bad tree is born as—what sort of fruit?

"Good."

It can't happen like that. If the fruit is good, then change the tree. You admit that this is good fruit, and that that's a bad man, because he's a secret adulterer; change the tree to suit this fruit.

"I've changed it," you say; "that's why I said from God."

Now compare these two newborn persons. That one was baptized by a manifestly chaste man, this one was baptized by a secret adulterer; that one was born of a man, this one of God. So he was luckier to be born of a secret adulterer, than that other one who was just born of a manifestly chaste man.

*The Donatists should listen to John the Baptist, and follow his example.*

8. So you had better listen to John, Mr. Heretic; better listen to the forerunner, Mr. Backtracker; better listen to the humble man, Mr. Proudman; better listen to the burning lamp, Mr. Lamp-put-out. Listen to John, when people came to him: *I indeed am baptizing in water*. And you, if you only acknowledged what you really are, are a minister of water. *I*, he said, *am baptizing in water; but the one who is coming is greater than I am*. How much greater than you is he? *The strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to undo*. How he would have been humbling himself if he had said that that was what he was worthy to do! He didn't even say he was fit to do that, to undo the strap of a sandal. *He it is who baptizes in the Holy Spirit* (Lk 3:16). Why do you put yourself in Christ's place? It's he that baptizes in the Holy Spirit.

So it's he that justifies. As for you, what do you say? "It's I that baptize in the Holy Spirit, I that justify." Aren't you in fact saying, *I am the Christ*? Aren't you in fact one of those about whom it was said, *Many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ* (Mt 24:5)? You're caught; and if only, once caught, you may be found, because if you are not caught you will have been lost. It's good to be caught as food for the great king by the nets of truth. So don't go on saying any more, "It's I that justify, I that sanctify," or you will be convicted of saying, *I am the Christ*. Say rather what a friend of the bridegroom said, don't aim at pushing yourself forward instead of the bridegroom: *Neither the one who plants is anything, nor the one who waters, but the one who gives growth, God* (1 Cor 3:7).

Listen too, again, to the one we are concerned with, the friend of the bridegroom. Now the fact is that together with Christ he had, it seems, his own disciples, and wasn't one of Christ's disciples; listen to him, though, confessing himself to be one of Christ's disciples. See him there among Christ's disciples, and all the more surely so, the humbler he was; all the humbler, the greater he was. See him carrying out what is written: *The greater you are, humble yourself all the more in all matters, and you will find grace in God's presence* (Sir 3:18). He has already said, *I am not worthy to undo the strap of his sandal*; but it wasn't there that he showed himself to be a disciple. *The one who comes from heaven, he said, is above all* (Jn 3:31); *but we have all received from his fullness* (Jn 1:16). So he too was among the disciples, though together with Christ he gathered his own disciples.

Listen to him confessing even more clearly that he was a disciple. *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom stands and listens to him* (Jn 3:29). And that's why he stands, because he listens to him. He stands and listens; because if he didn't listen, he'd fall. How right that one was to say, *To my listening you will give exultation and joy*. What's the meaning of *to my listening*? Listening to him, not wishing to be listened to instead of him. And for us to realize that in listening to him, he is recommending humility, after saying, *to my listening you will give exultation and joy*, he added straightaway, *and the bones that have been humbled shall exult* (Ps 51:8). So he stands and listens to him. *The bones that have been humbled shall exult*, because when they have lifted themselves up, they get broken.

So no servant must take to himself the authority and powers of the Lord. He should rejoice at belonging to the household, and if he is in charge, he should *provide his fellow servants with their rations at the right time* (Mt 24:45); but rations on which he too lives himself, not as though they were living on him. What, I mean, does *providing rations at the right time* amount to, but providing Christ, praising Christ, putting Christ forward, preaching Christ? That's what *providing rations at the right time* is. Because in order that Christ himself might be the rations for his beasts, he was placed, when he was born, in a manger.

### NOTES

1. Fischer, Kunzelmann, and La Bonnardière all suggest, more widely, between 393 and 405. I put 399 as the mean; but also the language he begins with in section 1, about his being a *minister* and not a *magister*, as well as his conclusion about the duties of the *praepositus*, the one in charge, suggests very definitely that he was already bishop of Hippo Regius, not just a priest of the city, or even just the auxiliary bishop. The question of the nature of his authority would not have arisen before he was ordained bishop. All this also indicates clearly, to my mind, that he was preaching in Hippo Regius; though it could also indicate that he was preaching in the presence of several other bishops, perhaps in a council, either there or elsewhere.

2. The sustained first person plural in this passage suggests that there were other bishops present. See Sermon 23, note 5.

3. See Lk 1:44.

4. See Jn 3:22-26.

5. The Donatist clergy.

6. The cause has nothing particularly to do with the Donatists, who were brought in just as a kind of spontaneous aside at that point. His argument is proceeding in a very rambling sort of way. The sermon does rather give the impression that he was very tired, that his mind was not functioning at its sharpest and best.

7. This is actually what people were saying about Jesus himself, Jn 7:26. Augustine is transferring this text to the context of Jn 1:19.

8. By aiming at *being like God, knowing good and evil* (Gn 3:5).

9. A rather oblique allusion, I take it, to the second half of Mt 11:11, *but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*.

10. Namely, the grace, the original justice in which Adam had been created. I rather think that

John the Baptist is being credited with these excellent intentions, when he is leaping in his mother's womb at the presence of Christ in Mary's womb, Lk 1:41, as well as when he denied that he was the Christ, Jn 1:19.

11. He actually says, "by the grace of his greatness," *ejus magnitudinis gratia*; we have met similar odd reversals of the genitive before.

12. Wordplay, impossible to reproduce in English: *Si enim quod non erat fallaciter putaretur, ab illo qui erat veraciter amputaretur*. In the previous sentence too there is a playing on *agnoscere*, acknowledge, and *ignoscere*, pardon.

13. Still the same conjunction, *cum*; but earlier on he construed this clause with "thought it no robbery to be equal to God"; and so it was there natural to take it in its meaning of "since"; here, however, he construes it with "emptied himself," and so it takes on the sense of "while," or "though."

14. See Mt 5:45. Therefore, I think the unspoken thought runs, they ought to be able to acknowledge the creator; and if they don't, it means the sun of justice has not risen upon them.

15. "Savior," "saving," "salvation" in Latin also mean, and mean to the ordinary Latin ear, "healer," "healing," and "health."

16. Not quite a fair statement of the Donatist position; because if I am the wrong sort of person, that is, a sinner cut off from the Church, like the *traditores*, the betrayers of the sacred books during the great persecution of 303-313—then I don't baptize at all, however much I go through the motions. I need to be the right sort of person, to be in a state of grace, as we would say nowadays, for the recipient of my baptism to receive baptism, and the grace of baptism at all.

17. I am struggling to keep a grip on his immediate line of thought—because surely the answer to his rhetorical question is, "Of course you are." So this last sentence is a very free paraphrase of (perhaps indeed a substitution for) *Hoc forte ad me multum est intelligi*: this is perhaps for me too much to be understood.

18. See Acts 9:17-18.

19. See Mk 2:3-12.

20. See Jn 10:1-6.

21. *Si sapienter admittis*.

22. Reading *inquam*, as the Maurists suggest, instead of the text's *inquit*, he says.

23. That is, among the Donatist clergy; from the context this will emerge fairly clearly.

## NOTES

1. Fischer, Kunzelmann, and La Bonnardière date it more vaguely to between 405 and 411. It cannot be 411, because Sermon 296 was preached that year; this is certain (see O. Perler, *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin*, pages 287, 402). So I settle for 410, and presume it was preached in Hippo Regius.

2. “Almost everywhere,” perhaps, because Augustine would sometimes like to think of John, for example, as representing the Church, not to mention all sorts of other New Testament characters, who were not apostles, like the Canaanite woman, or the woman who suffered from the issue of blood.

3. He has in mind here Christ’s answer to Peter’s question which follows immediately on this passage, Mt 18:21. The answer was the parable of the unforgiving servant.

4. “Faithful” and “saints” are treated as interchangeable terms, on the model of Paul’s usage. See, for example, Rom 1:7, 1 Cor 1:2, 2 Cor 1:1, Phil 1:1, etc.

5. A name for the Church, derived from the Song of Songs, 2:14, etc.

6. Because confession brings guilt out into the open, outside.

7. *Characterem*; the mark with which the Christian is, so to say, branded or stamped by being baptized and confirmed. Here we have the beginnings of the doctrine of sacramental character.

8. In the sacrament of confirmation. See 2 Cor 1:21-22.

9. Their *peculia*; a term that meant in particular the savings which slaves were allowed by their masters to accumulate until they could buy their freedom. The Donatists, though, he is saying—that is, the Donatist bishops—do it by theft, without the master’s leave.

10. See Acts 22:10. Paul’s own account of his conversion to the Jerusalem mob colors Augustine’s memory of the first account in Acts 9.

11. See 2 Cor 11:23-27.

12. *In conspectu Domini*, literally, in the sight of the Lord. But I think it may be construed as equivalent to *in conspectum*, into the Lord’s sight, hence toward him.

## SERMON 296

## ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE HOLY APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

Date: 411<sup>1</sup>

*The circumstances in which Peter was told by Christ to feed his sheep*

1. This reading of the holy gospel, which sounded in our ears just now, is very apt for today’s feast. If it also went down from our ears into our hearts, and there found a place of repose—God’s word, you see, reposes in us, when we repose, and acquiesce, in the word of God—then it admonished all of us, who minister to you the Lord’s word and sacrament, to feed his sheep. Blessed Peter, the first of the apostles, both lover and repudiator of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the gospel shows, followed the Lord as he was about to suffer; but at that time he wasn’t able to follow him to the extent of suffering himself. He followed with his feet, he wasn’t yet capable of following with his virtue.

He promised he would die *for* him, and he wasn’t even able to die *with* him; he had staked more, you see, than his credit could stand. He had promised more than he could fulfill, because it was in fact unfitting that he should do what he had promised. *I will lay down my life*, he said, *for you* (Jn 13:37). But that is what the Lord was going to do for the servant, not the servant for the Lord. So as he had staked more than he was worth, he was then loving in a back-to-front sort of way; that’s why he was afraid and denied Christ. Later on, though, the Lord, after he has risen, teaches Peter how to love. While he was loving in the wrong way, he collapsed under the weight of Christ’s passion; but when he’s loving in the right way, Christ promises him a passion of his own.

*Peter is feeble, when he is presumptuously relying on himself*

2. We remember Peter’s weakness in being shocked at the idea that the Lord was going to die. That’s what I’m reminding you of. Look, I’m reminding you; those of you who remember can tell themselves the story with me; those who have forgotten can call it to mind as I remind them of it. The Lord Jesus Christ himself foretold his imminent passion to the disciples. Then Peter, full of love for him, but still of a worldly sort, afraid of the slayer of death dying, said, *Far be this from you, Lord, far be it; do yourself a favor* (Mt 16:22). He wouldn’t have said, *Do yourself a favor*, unless he acknowledged him to be God.<sup>2</sup> So,

Peter, if he's acknowledged by you to be God, why are you afraid of God dying? You're a man, he's God; and for man's sake God became man, taking upon him what he was not, without losing what he was. So the Lord was going to die in that respect in which he was going to rise again, as a man. So Peter was horrified at the prospect of a human death, and didn't want it to touch the Lord; unwittingly he wanted to close the purse from which our price would flow.

That's when he heard from the Lord, *Get back behind, Satan, for you do not share God's ideas, but men's* (Mt 16:23). A moment before he had said to him—when he had said, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God—Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona, because it was not flesh and blood that revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven* (Mt 16:16-17). A moment before, blessed; next minute, Satan. But how and why blessed? Not for anything of his own: *It was not flesh and blood that revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven*. And how and why Satan? *For you do not share God's ideas, but men's*.

Such then was Peter; loving the Lord and wishing to die for the Lord, he followed; and it all turned out as the doctor had foretold, not as the sick patient had self-confidently presumed. Questioned by a maid, he denies once, twice, a third time. He's glanced at by the Lord, he weeps bitterly, with the tears of devoted love he wipes clean the dirt of denial.<sup>3</sup>

*The only question is "Do you love me?"; the only answer, "I do"*

3. The Lord rises again, he appears to the disciples; now Peter sees him alive, whose death he had so feared; he sees, not the Lord slain, but death slain in the Lord. So now, encouraged by the example of the Lord's own flesh that death is not to be dreaded all that much, he is taught how to love. Now he really must love, now having seen the Lord alive after death, now he really can love, now he can love without anxiety; without anxiety, because he is going to follow.<sup>4</sup>

So the Lord says, *Peter, do you love me?*

And he answers, *I do love you, Lord*.

And the Lord says, "I don't want you, because you love me, to die for me; that, after all, is what I have already done for you. But what? Do you love me? What are you going to give me in return because you love me? *Do you love me?*

*I do love you.*

*Feed my sheep* (Jn 21:15-17). And the same again, and the same a third time, so that love might declare itself three times, because fear had denied three times.

Notice, take it to heart, learn; the only question asked is *Do you love me?*; the only answer given, *I do*. When he gives that answer, he's told, *Feed my sheep*. And with his sheep entrusted to Peter, and Peter together with his sheep taken into his own care, he now goes on to foretell his death, and says, *When you were younger, you used to gird yourself and go where you wished; but when you are older, another will gird you, and carry you where you do not wish to go. But he said this*, adds the evangelist, *to signify by what sort of death he was going to glorify God* (Jn 21:18-19). You can see that what is involved in feeding the Lord's sheep is not refusing to die for the Lord's sheep.

*The shepherd equal to the responsibility is one who is capable of paying for the sheep with his life*

4. *Feed my sheep* (Jn 21:17). Is he entrusting his sheep to a man equal, or less than equal, to the responsibility? First of all, what sort of sheep is he entrusting? Very valuable ones, bought<sup>5</sup> not with gold, not with silver, but with blood. If a human master were entrusting his sheep to a slave, he would undoubtedly consider whether the savings<sup>6</sup> of that slave are equal to the value of his sheep, and would say, "If he loses, or scatters, or eats any of them, he must have the wherewithal to pay for them." So he would entrust his sheep to a slave equal to the responsibility, and would require the slave's means in money for the sheep he had bought with money.

In this case, however, the Lord Jesus Christ is entrusting the slave with sheep he bought with his blood, and so he requires of the slave the capacity to suffer to the point of shedding his blood. It's as though he were saying, *"Feed my sheep; I am entrusting my sheep to you."*

What sheep?

"Ones I bought with my blood. I died for them. *Do you love me?* Be ready to die for them." And as a matter of fact, while that human slave of a human master would pay money for sheep destroyed, Peter paid the price of his blood for sheep preserved.

*Other shepherds, other ways of laying down one's life for the sheep*

5. Here we go then, brothers and sisters, I would like to say something suitable for this particular time.<sup>7</sup> It was not only Peter who heard what was entrusted to Peter, what was enjoined on Peter. The other apostles also heard, took it to heart, observed it; above all the one who shared Peter's sufferings, and this day with him, the apostle Paul. They heard all this, and transmitted it to us to be heard and listened to. We feed you, we are fed together with you; may the Lord grant us the strength so to love you that we are capable also of dying for you, either in fact or in fellow feeling.<sup>8</sup>

Just because, you see, a martyr's death did not come the apostle John's way, it does not mean that he could be wanting in a spirit prepared for martyrdom. He didn't suffer, but he was able to suffer; God was aware of his readiness. It's like the three boys cast into the furnace in order to be burnt up, not in order to live;<sup>9</sup> shall we deny they were martyrs, just because the flames couldn't burn them? Question the fire, they didn't suffer; question their willingness, they received the crown of martyrdom. *God is powerful enough*, they said, *to deliver us from your hands; but even if not*—there you have their steady hearts, their firm faith, their unshaken courage, their assurance of victory—but *even if not, be it known to you, O king, that we are not worshiping the statue which you have set up* (Dn 3:17-18). God had other plans; they were not burnt, but they extinguished the fires of idolatry in the spirit of the king.

*Complaints about Rome being sacked during Christian times*

6. So you can see, dearly beloved, what has been set before the servants of God during this age, on account of *the future glory that will be revealed in us*; a glory which no temporal tribulations of any kind or quantity can even begin to outweigh. *For the sufferings of this present time, says the apostle, are not to be compared with the future glory that will be revealed in us* (Rom 8:18). If that's the case, none of us should now be thinking in a worldly way, "This isn't the time."<sup>10</sup> The world is being turned upside down, the old man is being shaken, the flesh hard pressed; let the spirit flow clear.

"Peter's body lies in Rome," people are saying, "Paul's body lies in Rome, Lawrence's body lies in Rome, the bodies of other holy martyrs lie in Rome; and Rome is griefstricken, and Rome is being devastated, afflicted, crushed, burnt; death stalking the streets in so many ways, by hunger, by pestilence, by the sword. Where are the memorials of the apostles?"

What's this you're saying?

"Here's what I'm saying; Rome is suffering such enormous evils; where are the memorials of the apostles?"

They are there, they are there, but they are not in you. If only they were in you, whoever you are that are saying these things, whoever you are, foolish enough to think these things, whoever you are, called in the spirit and savoring the flesh, whoever you may be of that sort! If only the memorials of the apostles were in you, if only you really gave a thought to the apostles! Then you would see whether they were promised an earthly felicity or an eternal.

*Even if we don't know God's reasons,  
we must willingly accept his decisions*

7.<sup>11</sup> Listen to the apostle, if his memory, his memorial, is still alive in you: *For the temporary lightness of our tribulation works in us to an unbelievable degree, and beyond an unbelievable degree, an eternal weight of glory, if we do not fix our gaze on the things that are seen, but on the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal* (2 Cor 4:17-18). In Peter himself the flesh was temporary, and aren't you willing for the stones of Rome to be temporary? The apostle Peter is reigning with the Lord, the body of the apostle Peter is lying in some place or other. His memorial is meant to stir you to love of eternal things, not so that you may stick to the earth, but so that with the apostle you may think about heaven.

Tell me, if you're one of the faithful, call to mind the memorials of the apostles,<sup>12</sup> the memorial even of the Lord your God, who is certainly now seated in heaven. Listen to where the apostle is directing you: *If you have risen with Christ, savor the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God; seek the things that are above, not the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, your life, appears, then you too will appear with him in glory* (Col 3:1-4). What you've heard here is, in one word, "Lift up your hearts." So are you griefstricken, and

crying, because timbers and stones have fallen down, and because people have died who were going to die anyway? Granted that someone who's dead is going to live for ever; are you grieving over the collapse of timbers and stones, and the fact that those who were going to die anyway have died? If you have lifted up your heart, where have you got your heart? Is there anything dead there, anything that has collapsed? If you have lifted up your heart, *where your treasure is, there is your heart* (Mt 6:21). Your flesh is down below, and if your flesh feels dread, don't let it shake your heart.

"But all the same," you say, "I didn't want it to happen."

What didn't you want to happen?

"I didn't want Rome to suffer such dreadful things."

We can pardon you for not wanting it. Don't you be angry with God because he did want it; you're only human, he's God. You're saying, "I don't want it," where he's saying, "I do." He doesn't condemn you for your "I don't want it," and are you going to reproach his "I do"?

"But why does God want this?"

Why does God want this? For the time being accommodate yourself to the will of the Lord your God; when you have become his friend, you will know<sup>13</sup> the plans of the Lord your God. What slave when his master tells him to do something, would ever be so proud as to say "Why?" The Lord keeps his counsel and his plans to himself. They become clearer if he does his duty, if he does well, if from being a servant he becomes a friend, as the Lord himself said: *I will no longer call you servants, but friends* (Jn 15:15). Perhaps he will also learn his Lord's plans; meanwhile, before he knows the plans, let him willingly carry out the decisions.

*Put up with what God wants, and he will give you what you want*

8. The lesson I'm still teaching you, as a matter of fact, is patience, not yet wisdom.<sup>14</sup> Be patient, it's the Lord's will.<sup>15</sup> You ask why it's his will? Put off your eagerness for knowledge, prepare for the strenuous effort of obedience.<sup>16</sup> He wants you to bear with what he wants; bear with what he wants, and he will give you what you want. And yet, my dear brothers and sisters, I make so bold as to say that you are going to listen to this gladly, if you already have the basic elements of obedience, if there is to be found in you the meek and mild patience of bearing with the Lord's will, not only when it is mild. When it's mild, of course, we don't bear with it, we love it; it's when it's hard and harsh that we tolerate it, when it's mild and easy we rejoice.

Observe your Lord, observe your head, observe the model of your life; pay attention to your redeemer, your shepherd. *Father, if it may be so, let this cup pass from me*. How perfectly he shows his human will, and straightaway turns his resistance into obedience! *However, not what I wish, but what you wish, Father* (Mt 26:39). And here, look, he also said this to Peter: *When you are old, another will gird you, and carry you where you do not wish* (Jn 21:18). He indicated in him too the human will, as it shrinks from death. Does it mean, because he didn't wish to die, that he didn't wish to receive the crown?

So with you too, what is it you didn't want? To lose your savings, perhaps, which you were going to leave behind here? Take care you don't remain behind with what should be left behind. You didn't want, perhaps, your son to die before you, you didn't want your wife to die before you. Well after all, even if Rome hadn't been captured, wasn't one of you going to be the first to die? You didn't want your wife to die before you; your wife didn't want her husband to die before her; was God going to accommodate both of you? Let the right order remain with him; he knows how to set in order what he has created. It's for you to accommodate yourself to his will.

*How to answer those who blame the Christian times*

9. I can already see what you are saying in your heart: "Look, it's during Christian times that Rome is being afflicted, or rather has been afflicted and burnt. Why in Christian times?"

Who are you, saying this?

"A Christian."

So you answer yourself, if you're a Christian: "It's because it was God's will."

"But what can I say to the pagan? He's insulting me."

What's he saying to you? How is he insulting you?

"Look, when we used to offer sacrifices to our gods, Rome continued to stand. Now, because the sacrifice of your God has won the day and been so frequently offered, and the sacrifices of our gods have been stopped and forbidden, look what Rome has to suffer."

For the time being, give him a very short answer, to get rid of him. You, however, should have quite other thoughts. You weren't called, after all, to embrace the earth, but to obtain heaven; you were not called to an earthly, but to a heavenly felicity; not to temporal success, and fleeting and fickle prosperity, but to eternal life with the angels. Still, for this lover of worldly felicity and grumbler against the living God, who prefers to serve demons and sticks and stones, there's a quick answer you can give. As their own histories tell us, this is the third time the city of Rome has been burnt. As their own history relates, their own literature relates, this burning of the city of Rome that has just happened is the third occasion. The city that was recently on fire amid the sacrifices of Christians had already been twice on fire amid the sacrifices of the pagans. It was once burnt like that by the Gauls, so that only the Capitol Hill was left. A second time Rome was set on fire by Nero, I don't know whether to say out of savagery or out of frivolity. Nero, the emperor of Rome, gave the order; the slave of idols, the slayer of the apostles, gave the order, and Rome was set on fire. Why, do you suppose, for what reason? A proud, conceited and frivolous man enjoyed the Roman blaze. "I want to see," he said, "how Troy was burnt." So it was burnt in this way once, a second time, and now a third time. Why do you like growling against God for a city that has been in the habit of being on fire?

*While pagans may have something to wring their hands over in the sack of Rome, Christians haven't*

10. "But," they say, "so many Christians suffered such dreadful evils in the sack of the city."

Has it escaped your notice that it is the prerogative of Christians to suffer temporal evils, and hope for everlasting goods? You pagan, whoever you are, have something to wring your hands over, because you have lost your temporal goods, and haven't yet discovered eternal goods. The Christian, though, has something to think about: *Reckon it every joy, my brothers, when you fall into various trials* (Jas 1:2). When this sort of thing was chanted to you in the temple: "The gods who protected Rome have not saved it now, because they no longer exist," you would say, "They did save it, when they existed."

We, though,<sup>17</sup> can show that our God is truthful; he foretold all these things, you've all read them, you've heard them; but I'm not sure whether you've remembered them, you that are upset by such words. Haven't you heard the prophets, haven't you heard the apostles, haven't you heard the Lord Jesus Christ himself foretelling evils to come? When old age comes to the world, when the end draws near—you heard it, brothers and sisters, we all heard it together—*There will be wars, there will be tumults, there will be tribulations, there will be famines* (Mk 13:7-8; Lk 21:9-11). Why are we so contradictory to ourselves that when these things are read we believe them, when they are fulfilled we grumble?

*The world is more to blame, after the gospel has been preached and ignored*

11. "But more devastation," they say, "much more, is overtaking the human race now."

Well, I don't know about more, considering all past history; but for the time being, without prejudice to the truth on that point, suppose it is more; I think it is more. The Lord himself solves the problem. There's more devastation in the world now, much more devastation, he says. Why more devastation now, when the gospel is being preached everywhere? You observe how widespread is the preaching of the gospel; you don't observe in what a godless way it is being ignored. Right now, brothers and sisters, let's leave the pagans out of it for a moment or two, let's turn our eyes on ourselves. The gospel is being preached, the whole world is full of it. Before the gospel was preached, God's will was hidden; by the preaching of the gospel, God's will has become openly known. We have been told in the preaching of the gospel what we ought to love, what to think lightly of, what to do, what to avoid, what to hope for. We've heard it all, God's will is no longer hidden anywhere in the world.

Take the world as a servant, and pay attention to the gospel. Listen to the Lord's voice; this world is the servant: *The servant who does not know the will of his lord, and does not behave properly, will be beaten with a few lashes*. The servant, the world; it's the servant, because *the world was made through him*,

and the world did not know him (Jn 1:10). *The servant who does not know the will of his lord; there you have the world before; the servant who does not know the will of his lord, and does not behave properly, will be beaten with a few lashes. But the servant who knows his lord's will; there you have what the world is like now; now tell yourselves what follows, or rather let us all tell ourselves: The servant who knows his lord's will and does not behave properly, will be beaten with many lashes* (Lk 12:48.47). And if only it may be beaten with many lashes, and not be once and for all condemned!

Why do you jib at being beaten with many lashes, you servant who know the wishes of your Lord, and do things deserving of lashes? You're told (here you have one wish of your Lord's), *Store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can spoil, and where thieves cannot dig through and steal* (Mt 6:20). You're on earth, he's in heaven, telling you, "Give to me, put your treasure where I can guard it, send it ahead of you; why save it?" What Christ is guarding for you, can the Goth take away from you? You, on the other hand, wiser and more farsighted, naturally, than your Lord, wish to store up treasure nowhere but here on earth. But you are well aware of your Lord's wishes; he wanted you to store it up above. So you, busy storing it up on earth, must be prepared to be beaten with many lashes. Look, you know your Lord's will, that he wants you to save it up in heaven; you, his servant on earth, are doing what thoroughly deserves lashes, and when you're beaten you blaspheme, you grumble, and you say that what your Lord is doing to you ought not to have been done. What you, a bad servant, are doing, that ought to have been done, I suppose?

*God has only knocked pleasing toys  
out of the hands of undisciplined children*

12. At least hold on to this position: don't speak ill of your God; praise him, rather, for correcting you; praise him for putting you right, so that he may give you consolation. *For whom the Lord loves he corrects, and he whips every son whom he receives* (Heb 12:6). You, self-indulgent son of the Master, would like both to be received and not to be whipped; so that you may be thoroughly spoiled and he may be proved a liar. So the memorial of the apostles, by which heaven is being made ready for you, really should have saved for you on earth the crazy follies of the theaters?<sup>18</sup> That's why Peter died and was laid to rest in Rome, is it, in order that not a stone of the theater might fall? God is knocking the playthings of boys from the hands of ill-disciplined adults.<sup>19</sup>

Brothers and sisters, let us decrease both our sins and our grumbles; let us be sworn enemies both to our iniquities and our grumbling; let us be angry with ourselves, not with God. *Be angry*, most certainly be angry; but for what purpose? *And do not sin* (Ps 4:4). That's why be angry, in order not to sin. Everyone, after all, who repents, is being angry with himself; being sorry for what he has done, he works off his anger on himself. So do you want God to spare you? Do not you spare yourself; because if you spare yourself, he won't

spare you; because if he too does so, you are lost. Just as it's written, you see, *He whips every son whom he receives*, so also there's this other text to be afraid of: *The sinner has irritated the Lord*.

"How do you know"—it's as if he were asked—"How do you know that the sinner has irritated the Lord? I've seen the sinner prospering, every day I've seen him doing evil, and suffering no evil, and blaspheming against the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> I've been horrified and dismayed. *The sinner has irritated the Lord*; this sinner, who has done such evil things, and who suffers no evil has irritated the Lord, has he, provoked the Lord?"

*For the greatness of his wrath, he will not search out* (Ps 10:3-4).<sup>21</sup> That's what comes next: *The sinner has irritated the Lord; for the greatness of his wrath, he will not search out*.

The reason he won't search out is that he is very angry; the one who withholds correction is preparing damnation. *He will not search out*; because if he did search out, he would do some whipping; if he did some whipping, he would put you right. Now, though, he's very angry, very angry with the wicked who prosper. Don't be jealous of them, don't wish to be like them. It's better to be whipped than damned.

*You are God's sheep, we bishops are sheep with you, because we are Christians, but you too, with Peter, can feed Christ's sheep*

13. So the Lord entrusted his sheep to us bishops, because he entrusted them to Peter;<sup>22</sup> if, that is, we are worthy with any part of us, even with the tips of our toes, to tread the dust of Peter's footsteps, the Lord entrusted his sheep to us.<sup>23</sup> You are his sheep, we are sheep along with you, because we are Christians. I have already said, we are fed and we feed.

Love God, so that God may love you; and you can only show you love God to the extent that you manifestly love God's profits. What have you got that you can offer God, you clever so-and-so? What can you offer God? What Peter also could offer him, all that: *Feed my sheep*. What can you do for God? Help him become greater, become better, become richer, become more honorable? Whatever you will be, he will just be what he always was. So just look next to you; in case perhaps what you should do for your neighbor is help him reach God. *When you have done it for one of these least of mine, you have done it for me* (Mt 25:40). So if you are bidden to *break your bread to the hungry* (Is 58:7), have you a duty to shut the Church in the face of someone who is knocking?

*Augustine's grief that a Donatist who had come seeking admission to the Catholic Church, was objected to and driven away by some of the brethren*

14. Why have I said this? I was saddened by what I heard, though I wasn't present myself, that when someone from the Donatists came to the Church, confessing the sin of rebaptism, and was being exhorted by the bishop to repentance, he was objected to by some of the brethren, and driven away. I confess to your graces, this really hurt my deepest feelings; I tell you frankly,



this kind of diligence has pleased me not at all. I know they did it out of zeal,<sup>24</sup> I don't doubt they did it out of zeal for God. But they should also turn their attention to that passage of the apostle Paul, where he laments even those who *have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge* (Rom 10:2).

Look here; he wasn't admitted today; he dies tomorrow; at whose hands will his death be demanded?<sup>25</sup> You're going to say, "But he's pretending."

I answer, "But he's asking. Christian, I would now like you to teach me too; how do you know he's pretending?"

"Because he's afraid for his property."<sup>26</sup>

We know of many who have been afraid for their property, and have become Catholics for that reason. When they have been absolved from their liability, some of them have returned to the Donatists, some though have stayed. As long as they didn't enter the Church, they were afraid for their property; and when they did enter, they learned the truth, and remained. So then, how do you know that this man who is afraid for his property will be among those who turned out to be insincere, especially when such a strong light of truth is shining as now,<sup>27</sup> such an effective conviction of falsehood?

Why do you want to judge people's hearts, Mr. Man? Is that why we bishops have sweated away, that why we've toiled away, that why the truth should have been shown to be unconquered, that it should be made the enemy of those who seek it? We worked hard for the truth to be demonstrated, falsehood to be convicted. God helped us, it was done. Perhaps this man, for whose sake it was done, became a changed person by thinking about it carefully. Why do you want to pass judgment on his motives? I see him seeking admittance, and you accuse him of just pretending? Allow the truth, Christian, of what you can see, and leave judgment on what you can't see to God. Let me put the matter to your graces very briefly: we heard from the Lord himself that his sheep are to be fed; and we know what he says about the sheep through Ezekiel: that sheep must not push sheep around, sheep must not drive sheep away, the strong must not be a burden to the sick.<sup>28</sup> Think of what the apostle says: *Correct the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak* (1 Thes 5:14). *Correct the unruly*; let this be done. *Encourage the fainthearted*; let this be done. *Help the weak*; let this be done. *Let nobody return evil for evil to anyone* (1 Thes 5:15); let that be done. He said so many things; do we pay none of them any attention, except *Correct the unruly*? Notice: *Correct the unruly*. Start counting: *Encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, let nobody return evil for evil to anyone*. You, though, only pay attention to *Correct the unruly*; take care you aren't unruly yourself, and what's worse, both want to be unruly, and don't want to be corrected.

I beg you through Christ, I implore you not to ruin all our work. Or are you thinking that the thing we have here to be pleased about is that we have defeated falsehood? It's always the truth that is victorious; as for us, what are we? Falsehood was defeated, it was defeated a long time ago. But thank God, it has now been openly defeated, and shown up to everybody. A lot of hard work has gone into the cultivation; why should it be prevented from yielding its crop?

*All to be admitted, both those who had never been Catholics, and those who had been; but on somewhat different terms*

15. For the rest, brothers and sisters, these things must not happen. Nobody should love the Church in such a way as to grudge the Church its profits. It was the day before yesterday, or the day before that, that this thing I'm talking about happened; and the story went round loudly to everybody, that Donatists are not being admitted, when they come to the Church. Do you imagine<sup>29</sup> that no harm was done when this story reached everybody's ears? I'm asking your help; let this voice of mine echo in your ears today in such a way that the thing that has sounded well may drown out the noise of the thing that sounded so badly. Get to work on it.

This is what we said, this is what we bishops proclaim: let them come, let them be admitted in the customary way, those who have never hitherto been Catholics. As for those who were once Catholics, and have been found to be shaky, found to be inconstant and weak, found to be faithless—am I to spare them? Yes, certainly faithless—well perhaps those who have been faithless, will turn out to be faithful. Let them too come, and be admitted to penance. Nor should they kid themselves, that when they went back to the Donatist party they did penance there. That penance was being sorry for a good thing; let there be true penance and genuine repentance for a bad thing. When they did penance in the Donatist party, they were being sorry for something good they had done. Now let them do it and be sorry for the bad thing they have done.

You're afraid that since they were found to be faithless, they may trample on that which is holy?<sup>30</sup> But look, even here your fears are taken care of; they are admitted to penance;<sup>31</sup> they will be in penance as long as they wish, with nobody forcing them, nobody terrifying them to be reconciled. Because a penitent Catholic is no longer subject to the threats of the laws;<sup>32</sup> he begins to desire to be fully reconciled, with nobody now terrifying him; then at least, trust his sincerity. Let's grant, he was forced to be a Catholic; he will become a penitent. Who, apart from his own will, is forcing him to seek the place of reconciliation? So right now let us allow weakness to enter, so that later on we may test genuineness of will.

## NOTES

1. With its long discussion in sections 6-12 of reactions to the sack of Rome by the Visigoths, which occurred in August 410, this sermon can only have been preached on 29 June 411. See Sermon 295, note 1. It was preached in Carthage, where the great debate with the Donatists, presided over by the imperial commissioner, Marcellinus, had just taken place a few weeks earlier.

2. Augustine understood Peter's confession, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*, as being a confession of Christ's divinity, since he mistakenly supposed "Son of God" to be equivalent to "God the Son." What Peter, though, clearly did recognize in Christ was a supernatural control



over his own destiny—precisely as the Messiah who was to deliver Israel; and how could he do that by dying?

3. See Lk 22:54-62.

4. A neat piece of word play: *securus, quia secuturus*.

5. Reading, *Pretiosas emptas* with the Maurists, instead of the *Non pretio emptas* of a more recent edition: bought, not with a price, not with gold, etc.

6. *Peculium*; see Sermon 295, note 9.

7. He is referring to the sack of Rome, ten months previously, and its consequences. He comes to it in the next section. He may also be referring to the great colloquy or debate with the Donatists (see *Summary of the Conference with the Donatists*), mentioned in note 1.

8. *Aut effectu, aut affectu*.

9. See Dn 3:19-23.

10. I am assuming that this is the worldly thought which he is urging us not to think. But it could be just him telling us that this is not the time for worldly thoughts.

11. The whole of this section is lacking in the Maurist text.

12. Here I think the term “memorial” or “memory” has shifted from referring to the tombs of the apostles to signifying their writings (which are in effect also the writings of the Lord); their “memoirs,” which were thought to include the gospels.

13. Reading *scies* instead of the text's *sciens*: having become the friend, and knowing the plans, of the Lord. But the whole point here is that you don't know them, and are still being told to accept his will.

14. The wisdom of understanding God's plans.

15. Primarily the sack of Rome; but also that you should learn patience.

16. I here combine part of the Maurist text with part of the more recent edition's.

17. He now turns against the complaining Christian.

18. Again a reversal of genitives—at least, I reverse his: *theatra insanorum*.

19. Following the Maurists: *Excudit Deus delicias puerorum de manibus indisciplinatorum*, instead of the later edition's . . . *delicias de manibus puerorum indisciplinatorum*: playthings from the hands of ill-disciplined boys.

20. See Mk 3:29, and parallel passages.

21. So the Vulgate and other Latin texts, all following the LXX. Modern English translations give an entirely different sense.

22. He is picking up a thread he dropped almost as soon as he started it, at the beginning of section 5. Peter represents all the apostles, all bishops, the whole Church.

23. Following the Maurists. The later edition adds, “if, that is, we can manage it, the Lord . . .”

24. From here until the third sentence of section 15 is lacking in the Maurist edition.

25. See Ez 33:6, etc.

26. The sermon is being preached only a few weeks after the great Colloquy with the Donatists, held early in June. With judgment given in favor of the Catholics, the penalties against the Donatists were likely to be enforced with increasing rigor. They took the form of crippling fines and confiscations.

27. Just after the debate.

28. See Ez 34:20-21.

29. This is where the Maurists rejoin us.

30. See Mt 7:6. The reference here is to the eucharist.

31. So the Maurists; *in paenitentiam admittuntur*. The modern edition reads, *in paenitentia dimittuntur*; they are forgiven in penance. But this does not fit the ancient discipline; it looks like the correction of a copyist who knew very little about it.

32. The imperial laws against the Donatists. His point is that these lapsed Catholics can be readmitted to the Church as penitents. As such, while no longer subject to the penal laws and confiscation of property, they are still not admitted to communion. And like many such penitents, of whom we hear in other sermons, they can stay in “the place of penance” as long as they like. No

one is forcing them or terrifying them with penalties, to go on to seek admittance to “the place of reconciliation,” and so be admitted to communion. So why question their sincerity when they do so seek to be fully reconciled?

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A Translation for the 21st Century

### Part III — Sermons

Volume 10: Sermons 341-400

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## *THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE*

A Translation for the 21st Century

## *SERMONS*

III/10  
(341-400)  
on Various Subjects

*translation and notes*

Edmund Hill, O.P.

*editor*

John E. Rotelle, O.S.A.

New City Press

Hyde Park, New York

## SERMON 346B

## ON OUR JOURNEY THROUGH THIS LIFE

Date: 410<sup>1</sup>

*We are travelers along the way;  
our home country is the heavenly Jerusalem*

1. That this life of ours, dearest brothers and sisters, is a kind of traveling abroad from the home country of the saints, the heavenly Jerusalem, is what the apostle Paul teaches in the clearest possible way, when he says, *As long as we are in the body, we are traveling abroad from the Lord* (2 Cor 5:6). And because everyone who travels abroad obviously has a home country (nobody, I mean, without a home country can ever be abroad), we ought to know which our home country is, toward which we must ever be hastening, while turning our backs on all the attractions and delights of this life; the country we are on our way to, and where alone we are entitled to take our rest. God, you see, hasn't wished us to find true rest anywhere else but in that home country, because if he also gave us rest here, we would find no pleasure in returning there.

So in saying that Jerusalem is this home country, he didn't mean that earthly city, which *is in slavery with her children*, as the same apostle also warns us. That earthly one, you see, was given as a type and symbol with a special meaning to an earth-bound, material-minded people, who although they worshiped the one God, still desired from him only earthly prosperity. But there is another Jerusalem, which he says is in heaven; yes, there is a Jerusalem above, *which is the mother of us all* (Gal 4:25-26). He calls her a mother, like a metropolis; metropolis, you see, means mother city. So that is the one to which we must be hurrying along, knowing that we are still away abroad, and are on the way.

*Nobody arrives except those who are on the way;  
but not everyone who is on the way arrives*

2. Any people who don't yet believe in and trust Christ are not even on the way; they are going wrong, you see. They too are seeking the home country, but they don't know where or what it is, and they don't know how to get there. What's this I'm saying, that they are seeking the home country? Every soul seeks

rest, and seeks happiness; ask any people whether they wish to be happy, and they will answer without the slightest hesitation that they do. They all cry out that they want to be happy; but how to get to that happiness, and where that happiness is to be found, this they don't know; that's why they go wrong. You don't go wrong, after all, by not going anywhere; it's from going, and not knowing the way you should go, that every kind of going wrong arises.

The Lord calls us back to the right road, to the highway; and when we are made into believers, trusting Christ, we are not yet in the home country, but still we have begun to walk along the highway toward it. So on the one hand we are urging and warning all our dear ones—that is if we remember that we are Christians—those who are straying and going wrong with all sorts of vain superstitions and heresies, to come to the right road and walk along the highway; but on the other, those who are already on the highway ought to be encouraging one another. Nobody, you see, can arrive, except those who are on the right road; but not all who are on the right road necessarily arrive.

So those who don't yet keep to the way are caught in the greater danger; but as for those who are already on the highway, yes they too should not yet consider themselves safe, or they may be held back by the delights of the road itself, and not be drawn on by as much love as they should be to that home country where alone true rest is to be found. The steps, you see, which we take along this highway are the love of God and of our neighbor. If you love, you're running; and the more consistently you love, the faster you run, while the less you love, the more sluggish your progress along the road. But now, if you don't love at all, you're stuck on the road, while if you are longing for the world, you've looked back,<sup>2</sup> your face is not turned toward the home country. What's the use of being on the road if you're not going forward along it, but going backwards? That is, what's the use of being a Catholic Christian—that, you see, is what being on the highway means—and walking along the road, but by loving the world looking back?<sup>3</sup> It means you're going back to where you started from.

If, however, you are drawn away from the Catholic Church through the stratagems of any hostile tempter and bandit you may encounter along this journey, and led either into heresy or into some pagan forms of worship, or any other superstitions and machinations of the devil, you have already lost the way and taken a wrong turn once again.

*Let us then run along this way, which is the one Church of God*

3. And so, brothers and sisters, because we are Catholic Christians, let us run along this highway, which is the one Church of God<sup>4</sup> as it has been foretold in the holy scriptures. God, after all, did not wish it to be hidden, so that nobody might have any excuse; it was foretold that it would be found throughout the world, and it has been in actual fact presented to the whole world. Nor should we be worried by heresies and innumerable schisms; we should be more anxious if there weren't any, because they too have been foretold.<sup>5</sup> All of us, whether we remain in the Catholic Church or are outside it, bear witness to the truth of

the gospel. What's this I'm saying? We are all proof that everything said in the gospel is true.

How, I mean, was it foretold that the Church of God would be found throughout the nations? As one, set upon the rock, which the gates of hell might not overcome. By the gate of hell is meant the beginning of sin; *the wages of sin is death* (Rom 6:23), and death, of course, belongs to hell. But what is the beginning of sin? Let scripture be questioned: *The beginning*, it says, *of every sin is pride* (Sir 10:13), and if pride is the beginning of sin, pride is the gate of hell. So now, then, consider what it is that has given birth to all heresies; you will find they have no other mother but pride. When people, you see, give themselves a lot of credit, and call themselves holy, and wish to draw the crowds to themselves and tear them away from Christ,<sup>6</sup> it is only out of pride that they have made convenient heresies and convenient schisms. But because the Catholic Church is not overcome by all those heresies and schisms, that is by the daughters of pride, that's why it was foretold, *And the gates of hell shall not overcome it* (Mt 16:18).

*How to defeat the stratagems of the devil*

4. And so, brothers and sisters, as I had started to say, we are on the highway; let us run along it with love and charity, forgetful of merely temporal things. This highway requires strong, brave travelers, it doesn't welcome the reluctant and the sluggish. There will be many attempts at highway robbery along the way, the devil is lying in wait at every defile, everywhere he is trying to get a foot in the door and take possession; and those he does get possession of, he turns away from the road, or slows them down. When he turns them away, he stops them moving forward at all, or causes them to leave the highway and get entangled in errors and schismatical heresies, and be led away into various kinds of superstition.

Now he tempts us either through fear or through greed; but first of all through greed, by various promises and assurances, or by the seductive attractions of pleasure. When he finds someone who has despised these things, and has, so to say, slammed the door of greed in his face, he begins tempting through the door of fear; which means that if you were now not wishing to acquire anything more in the world, and had thereby shut the door of greed, you haven't yet shut the door of fear, if you are afraid of losing what you have acquired. And so, *be strong in faith* (1 Pt 5:9); don't let anybody lure you into a fraudulent deal by any sort of promise, nobody drive you into a fraudulent deal by any kind of threat. Whatever the world promises you, the kingdom of heaven surpasses it; whatever the world threatens you with, gehenna outdoes it. So if you want to get through all fears safely, fear the eternal pains which God threatens you with. Do you want to trample on all kinds of greed and lust? Desire eternal life, which God promises you. In this way, on the one hand you slam the door in the devil's face, on the other you open it to Christ.

NOTES

1. So Fischer and Kunzelmann. It is probably the tone of the allusions to the Donatists in sections 2 and 3, as also to temptations to revert to paganism, that persuades them of the likelihood of this date. The sack of Rome by Alaric the Goth in 410 was a gift to pagan anti-Christian propaganda (against which Augustine wrote *The City of God*), to which some of the weaker brethren may have easily succumbed; while the great Conference or Colloquy of Donatist and Catholic bishops was being planned and organized, with some faint hopes, perhaps, of ending the schism and drawing the Donatists back into the Catholic fold.

2. See Lk 9:62.

3. I have rearranged the order of words in this sentence, which runs in the text, *et amando saeculum in via ambulat, sed retro respexit*: and by loving the world walking along the road, but looking back. I rearrange it to *et in via ambulat, sed amando saeculum retro respexit*.

4. He will normally, of course, identify the way or road with Christ, in accordance with Jn 14:6. But if tackled on this point here, he would no doubt reply that since the Church is the body of Christ, it shares in his being the way; also—but this is the Church of the saints in heaven—in his being the truth and the life.

5. See Sermon 346A, notes 7 and 8.

6. That is, from the Catholic Church. He has the Donatist heresy and schism, or schismatical heresy, almost exclusively in mind in this passage.

are naturally saddened by the departure of one of our number; but didn't we hear the divinely inspired reading, *Being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long ages* (Wis 4:13)? So let us reckon ages in this case as days are usually reckoned. So then, hold onto whatever he did among you by his encouragement, by his sermons, by the example he set you in praising and worshiping God; and you yourselves will then be his most beautifully adorned memorial chapel. It doesn't mean much to him, after all, to be laid to rest in a marble tomb; but rather to be laid to rest in your hearts. Let him live, when entombed, in living tombs.<sup>2</sup> Your memory of him, you see, is his tomb. He is living in God's presence, and so is blessed; let him live in your presence, so that you too may be blessed.

I could, no doubt, exhort you with many words to be faithful and sensible, except that human grief would scarcely permit me either to speak. Accordingly, because God granted me the favor of being present with the dying man at the time of his death; and as he has also granted me the privilege of conducting his funeral—a service which we owe to charity, but which adds nothing to his felicity; as he has also granted me the consolation of seeing your holinesses and addressing you, to comfort you with what small comfort I can give; you must supply from your own thoughts whatever grief does not allow me to say. And as we cherish the memory of such a great man, even while our spirits are burdened with human sorrow, they are not overwhelmed with the despair that contradicts our faith.

### NOTES

1. This date has been carefully argued by O. Perler, *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin*, 352-354. A manuscript published at Monte Casino in 1873 heads the sermon, "Here begins a sermon of Aurelius Augustine, preached in the Florentian Basilica in the city of Bizerta on 17 April, to console the people for the death of a certain bishop." Perler argues cogently that the bishop in question was Augustine's friend Florentius; Augustine had preached at this basilica's dedication some eight years before. He had been bishop, it seems, since 401. Perhaps this is why Lambot disagrees with Perler, and dates the sermon to 412, since it clearly suggests that the dead bishop had only held his see for comparatively few years.

2. One sees what he means; but one cannot help its sounding rather gruesome—perhaps because our modern imaginations are too prone to literalism.

## SERMON 397

### ON THE SACK OF THE CITY OF ROME

Date: 410-411<sup>1</sup>

On the humility of Daniel

1. Let us take a look at the first reading from the prophet Saint Daniel, where we heard him praying, and were surprised at his confessing not only the sins of the people, but his own as well. Because after the prayer itself—his words indicate that he was confessing as well as praying—so after the prayer itself, *While I was praying*, he said, *and confessing my sins, and the sins of my people to the Lord my God* (Dn 9:20). So can anyone claim to be without sin, when Daniel confesses his own sins? I mean, some proud man or other<sup>2</sup> was asked through the prophet Ezekiel, *Are you wiser than Daniel?* (Ez 28:3). Again, the prophet also placed this Daniel among the three holy men, in whom God signifies the three sorts of human beings he is going to deliver, when *the great tribulation* (Rv 7:14) comes upon the human race, and he said that nobody would be delivered from it except Noah, Daniel and Job.<sup>3</sup> And indeed it's obvious that in these three names God is signifying, as I said, three kinds of human beings. After all, those three men have already fallen asleep long since, and their spirits are with God, and their bodies have dissolved into dust. And they have been placed at God's right hand,<sup>4</sup> and are in no dread of any tribulation from which they are longing to be delivered. So how will Noah, Daniel and Job be delivered from that tribulation? When Ezekiel said all this, Daniel alone was possibly still in the body. Noah and Job had already fallen asleep long before, and been laid in the sleep of death with their fathers. So how could they have been delivered even from the tribulation that was hanging over the people at that time?<sup>5</sup>

But Noah represents good leaders, who govern and direct the Church, just as Noah captained and steered the ark in the flood. Daniel represents the holy celibates, Job represents all the married people who live good and upright lives. It is these three kinds of people,<sup>6</sup> after all, that God will deliver from that tribulation. All the same, Daniel in particular is commended to our veneration, in that he is the only one of the three named<sup>7</sup>—and yet he confesses his sins. So with Daniel confessing his sins, is there anyone whose pride would not start trembling, whose conceit would not be deflated, whose swelling self-importance

tance would not be checked? *Who can boast that he has a chaste heart, or boast that he is pure from sin?* (Prv 20:9).

And people are surprised—and if only they were just surprised, and didn't also blaspheme—when God takes the human race to task, and stirs them up with the rod of fatherly correction, disciplining them before passing judgment; and frequently he doesn't pick out anyone in particular for chastisement, not wishing to find anyone whom he has to condemn. You see, he chastises the just and the unjust together—although who can really be called just, if even Daniel confesses his own sins?

*Rome not, in fact, destroyed like Sodom*

2. A few days ago we had a reading from the book of Genesis<sup>8</sup> which, if I'm not mistaken, made a great impression on us; where Abraham asks the Lord whether, if he finds fifty just men in the city, he would spare the city for their sake, or destroy the city together with them. And the Lord answered him that if in the city he found fifty just men, he would spare the city. Then Abraham continued with his questioning, and inquired whether, if there were fewer than fifty and only forty-five remained, he would spare it then too. God replied that he would spare it for the sake of forty-five. Why go on? Little by little, by his questions Abraham came down from that number to ten, and inquired of the Lord whether, if he discovered ten just men in the city, he would destroy them together with all the other countless bad men, or whether on account of the ten just men he would not rather spare the city. God replied that for the sake of even ten just men he would rather spare the city.

So what are we to say, brothers and sisters? A very urgent and pressing question occurs to us, after all, one put especially by people who try irreligiously to catch out our scriptures, not by those who search them devoutly. And they say, particularly with reference to the sack of such a great city, "Weren't there fifty just men in Rome? In such a great number of believers, such a great number of nuns and men vowed to chastity, such a great number of the servants of God of both sexes, couldn't even fifty just persons be found, even forty, even thirty, even twenty, even ten? But if it is impossible to believe that, why did God not spare that city for the sake of those fifty, or even of those ten?"

Scripture doesn't mislead us, if we don't mislead ourselves. When one's enquiring about God's justice, and God replies about justice, he is seeking people who are just according to divine, not human, standards.<sup>9</sup> So I can answer straightaway, Either he found that many just people there, and spared the city; or if he didn't spare the city, it means he didn't find the just people.

"But," the answer comes back to me, "it's plain that God didn't spare the city." I reply, On the contrary, it's not plain to me. There was no destruction of the city here, as there was for the inhabitants of Sodom. When Abraham was questioning God, after all, the problem was about the inhabitants of Sodom. Now God said, *I will not destroy the city* (Gn 18:32); he didn't say, "I will not scourge the city." He didn't spare the inhabitants of Sodom, he destroyed

Sodom; he totally consumed Sodom with fire,<sup>10</sup> not deferring this till the day of judgment; he inflicted on that city the punishment which he has reserved for all other wicked people to the day of judgment. Not a single one of Sodom's inhabitants remained alive. Nothing at all was left, of flocks, of people, of houses; the fire swallowed up absolutely everything and everyone. There you have how God destroyed a city. But from the city of Rome, how many people managed to leave and then return, how many remained and escaped unscathed, how many, seeking sanctuary in holy places, could not even be touched!

"But many," they reply, "were led away as captives."

That also happened to Daniel, not as a punishment for him, but as a comfort and support for the others.

"But many," they say, "were killed."

So also were many of the righteous prophets, *from the blood of Abel the just to the blood of Zechariah* (Mt 23:35); so too were all those apostles, so too was the Lord of the prophets and apostles himself.<sup>11</sup>

"But many," they say, "were tortured with a variety of excruciating torments."

Can we suppose that any of them suffered as much as Job?

"Horrific stories have been told us; of destruction, of fires, of rapes, slaughter, people tortured."

It's true, we've heard many things, we've lamented them all, often shed tears, found little to console ourselves with. I don't brush it all aside, I don't deny that we've heard many things, that many bad things were done in that city.

*Rome and Jo*

3. But for all that, my brothers and sisters, would your graces please take note of what I say. We heard the book of holy Job, and how he lost all his goods, lost all his children, and couldn't even keep the good health of his flesh, which was all that remained to him, but was struck with grievous ulcers from head to foot; and how he sat on the dunghill, rotten with his sores, oozing pus, swarming with maggots, tormented with excruciating bitter pains.<sup>12</sup> If we had been told that the whole city endured that kind of thing, that nobody was left there in good health but all were grievously wounded, that the living were rotten with maggots in the same way as corpses rot away—which would be more dreadful, this sort of thing or that war? In my opinion, the fury of steel would be kinder to human flesh than maggots; the flow of blood from wounds would be more tolerable than the oozing of loathsome matter from gangrene. You see a corpse decaying, and you're horrified; but that's why the pain is less, or rather why there's no pain at all, because the soul is absent. But in the case of Job, his soul was present, to feel everything, it was tied there, unable to escape, subjected to all the pain, being provoked to blaspheme.

Job, however, put up with his tribulations, and it was accounted to him as great justice.<sup>13</sup> So you shouldn't pay attention to what people suffer, but to what they do about it. What you suffer, my friend, is not under your control; but as

to what you do about it, your will is either guiltless or guilty. Job was suffering, his wife stood there, the only one left to him, not to comfort but to tempt him; not to bring healing, but to suggest blasphemy. *Say something against God*, she said, *and die* (Jb 2:9). You must realize that death would have come as a favor to him, and a favor that nobody was doing him. But in all these things that this holy soul was enduring, his patience was being exercised, his faith proved, his wife put to shame, the devil defeated. A great spectacle, the outstanding beauty of virtue shining in all that filth and squalor! The enemy is behind the scenes of his ruin; the hostile woman is openly prompting him to evil, the devil's assistant, not her husband's. She is another Eve, but he is not another Adam. *Say something against God and die*; extort by blasphemy, what you can't obtain by prayer.<sup>14</sup> *You have spoken like the silly woman you are. If we have received good things from the hand of the Lord, why do we not also put up with bad things?* (Jb 2:10).

Pay attention to the words of this brave believer; pay attention to the words of this man, who was rotting away outwardly, while his inner integrity remained. *You have spoken like the silly woman you are. If we have received good things from the hand of the Lord, why do we not also put up with bad things?* He's a Father; is he to be loved when he coddles us, rejected when he corrects us? Isn't he a Father, who both promises us life, and imposes on us discipline? Has this slipped your memory? *Son, when you enter the service of God, stand in justice and fear, and prepare your soul for trials and temptation. Accept everything that is brought upon you; put up with pain, and also be patient in your humiliation; since gold and silver are tested in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation* (Sir 2:1.4-5). Has this slipped your memory? *For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, while he whips every son whom he receives* (Heb 12:6).

*No earthly pains to be compared with those of hell*

4. Think about any tortures you like, extend your imagination to any human punishments you can think of; compare them with gehenna, and everything you can think of<sup>15</sup> is trivial. Here they are temporal, there eternal, both the torturer and the tortured. Those people aren't still suffering, are they, who suffered at that time when Rome was sacked? That rich man, though, is still suffering in hell.<sup>16</sup> He was on fire, he is on fire, he will be on fire; he will come to the last judgment; he will get back his flesh, not to his benefit, but to his added punishment. Those are the pains we should fear, if we fear God. Whatever people may suffer here, if they let themselves be corrected by it, it means their improvement; if they are not corrected by it, it means a double condemnation. I mean, they pay the temporal penalty here, and there they will experience the eternal one.

I'm telling your graces, brothers and sisters: we certainly praise the holy martyrs, we reverence their merits, and if we can we imitate them. Great indeed is the glory of the martyrs; but I'm not sure that the glory of holy Job was any less. And yet he wasn't told, "Offer incense to idols, sacrifice to alien gods,

deny Christ." What he was told, though, was "Blaspheme God." Nor was this said to him, as though it meant, "If you blaspheme, all this putrescence will vanish, your health will be restored." But, "If you blaspheme," said the mindless, witless woman, "you will die, and by dying you will be done with your torments." As though eternal pain would not be waiting for one who died blaspheming! The silly woman shrank in horror from the distress of the man rotting away there in her presence, and gave not a thought to the eternal flames. He for his part bore with his present pains in order not to fall into those of the world to come. He kept his heart from evil thoughts, his tongue from cursing; he preserved his soul's integrity in the rottenness of his body. He could see what he was avoiding for the future; and that is why he bore with his troubles patiently.<sup>17</sup>

In the same way all Christians, when they are suffering from some bodily or material difficulty, should think about hell, and consider how light in comparison is what they are suffering. They shouldn't grumble against God, shouldn't say, "God, what have I done to you, why am I suffering these things?" On the contrary, they should say what Job said, even though he was a saint: *You have sought out all my sins, and sealed them up as in a bag* (Jb 14:16-17). He didn't dare to say that he was without sin, though he was suffering, not as a punishment, but as a test. Let anyone who suffers say the same.

*The just suffer like the poor man at the rich man's gate*

5. There were fifty just men in Rome, or rather, if you reckon it by human standards, thousands of just people; if you are looking for the standard of perfection, not a single just person would be found in Rome. Any who have the nerve to call themselves just will hear Truth asking them, "*Are you, then, wiser than Daniel?*" (Ez 28:3). So listen to him confessing his sins."<sup>18</sup> Or perhaps when he was confessing he was lying? So by that very fact he had a sin, because he was lying to God about his sins.

But people sometimes argue like this, and say, "Even a just man ought to say to God, 'I am a sinner'; and although he knows that he has no sin, still he should say to God, 'I have sin.'" I wonder if this can be called even sane advice. Who ensured that you have no sin? If you are totally without sin, isn't it because God has healed your soul? If, that is of course, you don't have any sin. I mean, you only have to reflect a little, and you will find not sin but sins. Still, if you really haven't got any sin at all, isn't this a favor done you by the one to whom you have said, *I said: Lord, have mercy on me; heal my soul, since I have sinned against you* (Ps 41:4)? So if your soul is without sin, your soul has been healed in every respect; if your soul has been healed in every respect, why are you ungrateful to the doctor, and saying it still has a wound, when he has restored you totally to health? If you were presenting your body, ill and wounded, to a doctor, and begging him to do all he could to cure you, and he in fact made you well and restored you to complete health, and you still went on telling him that you were not well at all, wouldn't that mean you were not only being ungrateful

to the doctor but also insulting him? In the same way, God has healed you, and you still have the nerve to say, “I have a wound”? Aren’t you afraid he may answer you, “So I’ve done nothing, have I, or wasted all I have done? So I don’t get my fee, I don’t deserve any praise, is that it?” God preserve us from such lunacy, and from such a nonsensical kind of argument. So you should say, “I am a sinner,” because you really are a sinner; should say, “I have sin,” because you really do have sin. For you are not, if you think you have none, wiser than Daniel.

So then, brothers and sisters, let me now settle that question once and for all. If people are to be called just in the human kind of way in which they are called just, as regards a mode of living among their fellows without blame, then there were many such in Rome, and God spared many on their account, who got away alive. But even those who died were spared by God. After all, they died while leading a good life, in a state of true justice and good faith; so weren’t they now rid of all the distress of human affairs, attaining at last to their rest in God? They died after many tribulations, like that poor man at the rich man’s gate. But they endured hunger, you say? So did he. They suffered wounds? So did he; perhaps the dogs didn’t come and lick theirs. They died, did they? So did he; but listen to how it ended: *It happened that the poor man died, and was carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom* (Lk 16:22).

*God spared the city in the saints who died there*

6. If only we could see the souls of the saints who died in that war, then you would see how God spared the city. Thousands of saints, after all, are now at rest, rejoicing and saying to God, “We thank you, Lord, for snatching us from the distresses and torments of the flesh. We thank you, because now we are not in dread of either barbarians or devil; we are not afraid of famine on earth, or of the enemy; we are not afraid of any persecutor, not afraid of any oppressor. But we died on earth, and are with you, O God, never going to die, safe in your kingdom<sup>19</sup> by your gift, not by our merits.” What a city of humble citizens that can say all that!

Or do you suppose, brothers and sisters, that what counts as a city is walls, and not citizens? Finally, if God had said to the inhabitants of Sodom, “Flee, because I am going to set fire to this place,” wouldn’t we have said that they were people of great merit if they had fled, and fire coming down from heaven had laid waste only towers and walls? Wouldn’t that have meant that God did spare the city, because the city had emigrated, and escaped destruction by that fire?

*A comparable event at Constantinople*

7. Isn’t it the case that a few years ago, under the emperor Arcadius<sup>20</sup> at Constantinople—perhaps some people are listening to what I am saying who know about it, and some who were present there at the time are now in this

congregation—God decided to terrify the city and by terror to correct it, by terror to convert it, by terror to cleanse it, by terror to change it; so he came in a revelation to a faithful servant of his, a military man so it’s said, and told him that that city was going to perish in fire coming from heaven, and instructed him to tell the bishop? He did so; the bishop didn’t make light of it, he addressed the people. The city was converted to mourning and repentance, as once upon a time that Nineveh of old.<sup>21</sup>

However, in case people should suppose that the man who had told them this had been misled by a misunderstanding, or had wished to mislead them deliberately, the day came which God had threatened; everybody was very tense, and in great fear expecting to be destroyed, when at the beginning of the night as the world was already growing dark, a fiery cloud appeared from the east, small at first, and then it gradually grew as it approached over the city, until it hung, terrible and huge, above the whole city.<sup>22</sup> Horrid streamers of fire were seen to hang from the sky, and the stench of sulphur was not lacking either. All took refuge in church, and the place couldn’t hold the multitude. Everyone was extorting baptism from anyone they could. Not only in church, but in houses, streets, squares, the saving sacrament was being demanded; in order to escape, obviously, not the present threat, but the wrath to come.

Still, after that *great tribulation* (Rv 7:14), in which God confirmed the truth of his words, and of the revelation made to his servant, the cloud began to diminish just as it had grown, and gradually it disappeared. The people, feeling a little safer now, again heard that they must all quit the city, because it was going to be destroyed the following Saturday. The whole city moved out, together with the emperor; nobody stayed at home, nobody locked his house. They withdrew a good distance from the walls, and looking back at their sweet dwellings,<sup>23</sup> with tearful voices they said farewell to the beloved homes they had left. And when that vast crowd had gone a few miles, stopping together, though, in one place to pour out prayers to God, they suddenly saw a great column of smoke, and cried out with a loud shout to the Lord. At length, when the sky cleared they sent some scouts to bring back news. When the anxious hour foretold had passed, and the messengers reported that the walls of the city and all the houses remained intact, they all returned with great relief and thankfulness. No one lost anything from his house, everybody found his open house just as he had left it.

*The example applied to the case of Rome*

8. What are we to say? Was this God’s wrath, or not rather his mercy? Can anybody doubt that it was the will of the most merciful Father to correct by inspiring terror, rather than to punish, when such an impending, looming disaster in fact did no harm to a single person, a single house, or to any part of the city walls? Clearly, what happened to that city was like when a hand is raised to strike, and then lowered out of pity when the person threatened by it shrinks back in dismay. However, if at that time, when the city was deserted and the



whole population had left, devastation had overtaken the place, and destroyed the whole city like Sodom, with not even any ruins remaining, who even so could doubt that God had spared that city, which being forewarned and terrified had moved out and withdrawn, while only the empty place was consumed with fire?

In the same way it cannot be doubted at all that God did also spare the city of the Romans, who in great numbers had moved out before the enemy set fire to the place. Those who fled had moved out, those who departed more swiftly from the body had moved out and on. Many who remained hid themselves somehow or other, many were preserved alive and safe at the shrines of the saints. So that city was rather chastised than destroyed by the correcting hand of God; just as *the servant who knows his lord's will, and does things that deserve a beating, will be beaten with many strokes* (Lk 12:47.48).

*What that whole city suffered, one single man also suffered;  
the King of kings and Lord of lords*

9. And if only this example availed to induce some fear into the rest of us, so that we restrained our evil desires from thirsting for the world, and from being hell-bent on the most pernicious pleasures! God, after all, is demonstrating in this way how shaky and fleeting are all the vanities and misleading follies of this age. So let us not go on grumbling against the Lord, as we tend to do. There's only one flail, though, experienced by the threshing-floor, both to cut up the straw and to cleanse the grain; there's only one fire experienced by the goldsmith's furnace, both to reduce the straw to ashes and to eliminate the dross from the gold. In the same way Rome endured just one tribulation, in which the godly were either delivered or corrected; while the ungodly were condemned, whether they were snatched from this life to pay even more the justest of penalties, or whether they remained here to go on blaspheming more damnably than ever, or even, out of the unimaginable clemency of God, who knows who are to be saved, to be kept by him for repentance.

So we shouldn't let the hardships of the godly upset us; they are being put through their paces, not being disqualified. Unless of course we are horrified when we observe the grievous and undeserved things suffered on this earth by some just person, and forget what was endured by the Just One and by the Saint of Saints.<sup>24</sup> What that whole city suffered, one man also suffered. But notice who that one man was: *the King of kings and Lord of lords* (Rv 19:16), seized, bound, scourged, treated to all kinds of abuse, hung on a tree and crucified, killed. Weigh up Rome against Christ, weigh up the whole earth against Christ; weigh up heaven and earth against Christ; nothing created can balance the creator, no work be compared with the craftsman. *All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing* (Jn 1:3); and yet by his persecutors he was reckoned as nothing.<sup>25</sup>

So let us bear with whatever God may wish us to bear with, seeing that,<sup>26</sup> like a doctor, he knows what pain is useful for curing and healing us. It's written,

isn't it, *Let patience have a perfect work* (Jas 1:4)? But what work will there be for patience to have, if we suffer no adversity? So why should we refuse to endure temporal evils? Do we, perhaps, dread being made perfect? But clearly we should be praying and sighing to the Lord, that he would carry out in our regard what the apostle says: *God is faithful, and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear; but with the temptation he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to endure it* (1 Cor 10:13).

## NOTES

1. The sermon could have been preached any time after August 410; but the indications are that it was soon after the event. Carthage, I think, is the most likely city for it to have been preached in, especially given what he says in his little aside at the beginning of section 7. The sermon is found in two editions; that of the Maurists, and the contemporary one in the series *Corpus Christianorum*, CCL. The text being translated here is the CCL one, but I often prefer the Maurists, and make a note to that effect when I do. I must confess to occasional doubts about the sermon's authenticity; but they are not supported by any of the authorities.
2. The king of Tyre.
3. See Ez 14:12-20. The prophet is making rather a different point, and not giving the passage the eschatological significance which the preacher gives it.
4. As in Mt 25:33, not as in Mk 10:37, or Acts 7:56.
5. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 587 BC, and the subsequent exile in Babylon.
6. In fact, clergy, religious and laity. It is here I begin to have some qualms about the sermon's authenticity - or at least the authenticity of parts of it.
7. In Ez 28:3.
8. Gn 18:16-33.
9. The relevance of this remark escapes me.
10. Gn 19:24.
11. Here the CCL text adds "Jesus."
12. See Jb 1 & 2.
13. See Rom 4:3.
14. That is, the favor of death. Blasphemy would extort it, because it would bring it upon him as the prescribed punishment.
15. So the Maurists; CCL has "everything you suffer."
16. See Lk 16:19-26.
17. Neither Augustine nor any of his contemporary preachers ever seem to have got beyond the first two chapters of the book of Job. Never does he advert, in his references to it, to the problem of innocent suffering which the book wrestles with, nor to Job's very full complaints, the answers given him by his comforters, and the Lord's final reply from the whirlwind. Yes, he does go on in a moment or two to quote from a later chapter; but then he stands the text's actual meaning on its head.
18. In Dn 9:20.
19. This phrase is lacking from the CCL text.
20. Arcadius died in 408. Theodosius the Great had arranged that after his death the empire should be divided between his two sons; Arcadius to rule the East from Constantinople, Honorius to govern the West from Ravenna. From the aside that follows I infer that Carthage was more likely to be the place where this sermon was preached than Hippo Regius; visitors and traders from Constantinople were more likely to be found in a congregation in the metropolis of Africa.
21. See Jon 3:5-10.

22. I here follow the Maurists, but I also accept an emendation to their text by earlier editors which they turn down. They read *ignis*, fire, which those editors emended to *ingens*, huge. The CCL text reads *ingens timor*, "until a huge fear hung terribly over the city." This strikes me as the weakest of all three variants; it suggests that *timor* was inserted in an "*ingens*" text, because the copyist didn't realize that *ingens* referred to the fiery cloud.

This strange event is related in the *Chronicle* of Ammianus Marcellinus, for the year 396, a year before Saint John Chrysostom was appointed bishop of Constantinople.

23. *dulcia tecta respiciens*. I here suspect a quotation from, or allusion to, Virgil's *Aeneid*; but I cannot trace it.

24. See Acts 3:14; Dn 9:24.

25. So the Maurists; CCL reads, "and yet he was betrayed by his persecutors"—both inaccurate, and feeble in comparison.

26. Again, I follow the Maurists. CCL here inserts, *suum Filium misit*, "he sent his Son for our cure and healing." But it makes the sentence, in fact, grammatically impossible to construe, and has every appearance of being a marginal comment, that was later thrust into the text.

## SERMON 398

### ON THE CREED TO THE CATECHUMENS

Date: 425<sup>1</sup>

*The rule of faith, called the symbol*

1. Receive, sons and daughters, the rule of faith, which is called the symbol. And when you have received it, write it on your hearts, and say it to yourselves every day; before you go to sleep, before you go out in the morning, fortify yourselves with your symbol.<sup>2</sup> Nobody writes a symbol for it to be read, but for purposes of recall; to prevent forgetfulness from deleting what carefulness has handed over to you, let your memories be your books. What you are going to hear is what you are going to believe, and what you have believed is also what you are going to give back with your tongues.<sup>3</sup> The apostle says, after all, *With the heart one believes unto justice, but with the mouth one makes confession unto salvation* (Rom 10:10). This, you see, is the symbol which you are going to get by heart and give back.<sup>4</sup>

These words which you have heard are scattered throughout the divine scriptures, but they have been gathered from there and reduced to one short form, so as not to overload the memories of slower minds, and so that all may be able to state, may be able to retain, what they believe. I mean, was it only just now that you heard that God is almighty? But you will begin<sup>5</sup> to have him as your father, when you are born of the Church as your mother.

*What it means for God to be almighty*

2. So this is what you have already received, and thought about, and held onto after thinking about it, so that you can say, *I believe in God the Father almighty*. God is almighty; and while he is almighty, he is unable to die, unable to be deceived, unable to lie, and as the apostle says, *he cannot deny himself* (2 Tm 2:13). How many things he is unable to do, and he is almighty! And that's why he is almighty, because he cannot do these things. I mean, if he could die, he wouldn't be almighty; if he could lie, could be deceived, could deceive, could act unjustly, he wouldn't be almighty, because if it were in him to do that sort of thing, he wouldn't be fit to be almighty. Of course our almighty Father cannot