

BERNARD of CLAIRVAUX *on the*



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I*

Sermons 1-20

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CISTERCIAN FATHERS SERIES : NUMBER FOUR

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

Volume Two

ON THE
SONG OF SONGS I

CISTERCIAN FATHERS SERIES: NUMBER FOUR

THE WORKS OF
BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

Volume Two

Song of Songs I

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Thanks to his hidden labor as a "Priest of Mount Melleray" countless thousands during the past half century have been nourished with the writings of the Mellifluous Doctor.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The translation presented here is based on the critical edition established by Dom Jean Leclercq, Dom Henri Rochais and Dr Charles Talbot and published in Rome by Editiones Cistercienses in volume one of the *S. Bernardi Opera*. A study concerning the manuscripts and the text can be found there. The Sermons which appear in this volume were composed by St Bernard toward the middle of his monastic career around 1136, certainly before he went to Italy in 1137. The question as to whether these and the other Sermons on the Song of Songs were actually ever preached in the chapterhouse at Clairvaux or were purely literary works will be studied in the introductory essay in our second volume of Sermons (Cistercian Fathers Series 7). A complete index to all of St Bernard's Sermons on the Song of Songs will be found at the end of the collection after Sermon Eighty-eight (Cistercian Father Series 40).

M. Basil Pennington OCSO

INTRODUCTION

THE GENIUS OF ST BERNARD expresses itself to the full in his eighty-six Sermons on the Song of Songs. Nowhere else does his spiritual doctrine and experience display itself with such depth, vitality and spontaneity as in these conferences which are the fruit of his most mature years.

As with other affective and intuitive geniuses who have succeeded in focusing all the powers of their souls upon God, St Bernard reproduces in each of his important works the principal features of his spiritual doctrine. Each treatise that came from his pen might well be considered a treatise on charity. Yet his doctrine as found in the Sermons on the Song of Songs can be said to be a synthesis of the whole of his spiritual teaching. One can easily group around the principal passages of this commentary parallel passages from his other works. The latter might add a few nuances, sometimes even some important developments in his thought, but nothing really new. Indeed the Abbot of Clairvaux really speaks only of charity. One passage sums up his entire teaching: "What a great thing is love, provided always that it returns to its origin; . . . flowing back again into its source it acquires fresh strength to pour itself forth once again."¹

These two lines contain his entire spiritual program: to direct man's love to God; to restore with the help of God's grace a twisted power which clings unduly to creatures, in order that once freed it may find again the dignity of its origin.

1. Sermon 83:4.

Bernard found in the Bible an inspired book, Solomon's Song of Songs, which depicts this drama of the soul's relations with God in terms of the love which unites a bride to her bridegroom. It is true that Bernard often applies to the Church the words that are addressed to the spouse in this canticle of love. Entire Sermons are devoted to this subject. Also at times he tells us that the Virgin Mary is the only creature in whom this privileged union with God is perfectly realized. But his teaching is chiefly devoted to describing the joys of the loving union of the individual soul with the Word.

To appreciate all this, as well as to grasp the profound meaning of the Song, it is better to love than to study. As Bernard says: "Holy love is the only subject treated in this Song. We must remember that love reveals itself, not by words or phrases, but by action and experience. It is Love which speaks here, and if anyone wishes to understand it, let him first love. Otherwise it would be folly to read this song of love, because it is absolutely impossible for a cold heart to grasp the meaning of language so inflamed."² It is a topic which demands of the preacher profound conviction and personal experience.³

In the course of the Sermons Bernard frequently appeals to his own experience. His whole life and doctrine were illumined by the mystic visits of the Word with which he confesses himself to have been blest. It is these personal contacts with God which made him so great a saint. To the objection that such graces are not given to everyone and that temperament predisposes some, St Bernard replies: "Those who have not yet enjoyed such an experience should desire it ardently," because "We do not hesitate boldly to proclaim that every soul, if it is vigilant and careful in the practice of all the virtues, can arrive at this holy repose and enjoy the embraces of the Bridegroom."⁴

Scripture supplies many texts which emphasize the need for personal contact with God in the transformation of the soul. A written law, imposed from without, even when its author is God himself, is incapable of effecting such a change: "I will put my law

2. Sermon 70:1.

3. Sermon 1:11.

4. Sermon 46:5; 57:4, 11.

in the depths of their beings and will write it upon their hearts . . . and then no man shall any longer be taught by his neighbor."⁵ Human instruction cannot content man, not even theology; he needs personal experience of God.

Bernard speaks of those realities upon which are based our hope of regaining the divine friendship; these constitute his anthropology.

Bernard's Anthropology

St Bernard encouraged his monks to aspire to union with God: "Perhaps you desire to repose in contemplation? You do well."⁶ They are to seek the kiss of the mouth, an exceptional grace; participation in the life of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, the mutual knowledge and love of the Father and Son.⁷

What is the basis for such audacity, such confidence? The reply to this question is twofold: first, knowledge of God, which preserves from despair, "because God is full of mercy, his nature is all good, and his actions pity and pardon."⁸ Second, knowledge of self, for this preserves from pride: "Nothing is more efficacious for acquiring humility than knowledge of ourselves as we really are."⁹ This twofold knowledge assures salvation, because in its light there appears the need for an encounter between man's misery and God's mercy. Here is the foundation of humble hope. Although all knowledge is good so long as it does not puff up, this is the most useful because it leads to God.¹⁰

To know God, man must know himself, and between these two extremes there must be some resemblance, since all knowledge supposes likeness: *iam in aliquo similis*.¹¹ Christ made himself known and loved by becoming like unto man. The tiny spark which always glows in the depths of the soul, the indelible image of God which lost so much of its likeness to him, is the ontological point of departure which opens to every human creature the possibility of a

5. Jer 31:33f.

8. Sermon 36:5.

11. Sermon 30:1f.

6. Sermon 79:1.

9. *Ibid.*

7. Sermon 8:1.

10. Sermon 36:2f.

return to his Father's house: "The soul preserves even in the region of unlikeness its inborn resemblance to God—a manifest sign of its divine origin."¹²

Three things in man remind him of the Holy Trinity: reason, ever ready to slip into error; the will, torn by its passions; and the memory, subject to forgetfulness. For Bernard these three powers make up the soul itself.¹³ No matter how far the soul wanders from God, this indestructible image reminds it of its Model and permits it to hope, not only for forgiveness of sins, but even for most intimate union with the Word: "Even though the soul is burdened with sins, the prisoner of vices and ensnared by carnal pleasures . . . apparently condemned and doomed to despair, we know that it can find within itself that which can lead it to hope for pardon and mercy, and to aspire to spiritual marriage with the Word. How could it fail to have such boldness and confidence in God, when it discerns within itself his image."¹⁴

Texts such as these demonstrate the genius of St Bernard in discovering the hidden sores of human misery. The drama of the human soul as he describes it is the conflict between the aspirations of man's nature and the perversion of his moral activity. He who rebels against God denies the most fundamental needs of his being: "The soul which has lost the divine resemblance, introduces within itself a disharmony, an interior division, which is all the more difficult to support because the original likeness to God remains side by side with the newly-acquired unlikeness. The soul is torn between hope and despair. By the perversion of its life and morals the soul becomes unlike its own true nature."¹⁵

What the Abbot has so clearly perceived is the dignity of the human person which ever remains as the seed of rebirth. This great truth stimulates his optimism. He cannot find sufficient words to sing the greatness of man. He adds phrase to phrase: *Celsa creatura*—exalted creature reflecting the majesty of God, great is the capacity of the soul—*O quanta animae latitudo*—which is judged worthy of

12. Sermon 27:6.

13. Sermon 11:5.

14. Sermon 83:1.

15. Sermon 82:2.

receiving within itself the presence of God—*capax Dei. Egregia natura*—peerless creature which, alas, has lost the divine resemblance by degrading itself to the animal level.¹⁶

The dignity of man therefore is found in his very nature—the indestructible image of God. Furthermore, there is special affinity between the soul and the Word, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. The latter is the only adequate image of God. Man has been created not *as* the image of God, but *after* the image of God. There exists a real relation between the likeness, the Word, and that which is made to the likeness, man: “To resemble the Word perfectly, the soul, already great by nature, because it is capable of eternal good, must also become upright.”¹⁷

St Bernard justifies his comparison between the soul and the Word by their triple likeness—simplicity and immortality, which are perfect in the Word and only relative in man, and especially free-will, which enables man to judge and to choose. This power of his soul has been injured through sin committed not from any natural necessity but from the weakness of the will. Fallen through its own fault, it is unable to rise again; it is caught in a state of voluntary servitude. It has willed its own slavery.¹⁸ With this slavery is associated the fear that springs from a disordered concupiscence. For the latter drags the soul toward created things and thus impedes the freedom of the will.¹⁹

Simplicity itself has been changed into hypocrisy: “Can you find me one son of Adam who will, I do not say desire, but merely endure to be known as he really is?”²⁰ Immortality is wounded, too. The body must die, and the soul through sin can perish eternally.²¹

How can man escape? “He must rely upon grace and not upon nature, nor even upon his own sincere efforts. He must turn toward the Word, because the affinity which links his soul to him is not illusory. The proof of this kinship is the likeness which remains.”²² This likeness becomes perfect only in charity: “We are amazed at the charity of God which, even when despised by man, does not

16. Sermon 80:2; 27:10; 35:6.

18. Sermon 81:7.

21. *Ibid.*

17. Sermon 80:3.

19. Sermon 82:5.

22. Sermon 82:7.

20. Sermon 82:3.

cease to call him back to his Maker. Cast out sin, the cause of this partial unlikeness, and you will attain spiritual union, perfect vision and mutual love."²³

The Road Back to God

Return to God is possible for man through the Word, whose likeness he bears within himself, and especially through the Word Incarnate, who has become like unto man.

The first thing to which St Bernard draws the attention of the man who desires to enjoy intimacy with the Word is the need of practicing virtue. The practice of good works and the exercise of virtues must precede the fruits of holy repose.²⁴ This practice of the virtues never comes to an end in this life because struggle is unceasing. Eve lives in our flesh and the serpent makes use of the concupiscence which she has passed on to us, to set snares for us by his continual temptation. . . . It is not enough to do good once or twice; we must work at all times.²⁵ The exercise of virtue is a good test for discerning true contemplation which is given as a reward for labor.

Obedience is man's principal labor: "Do not imagine that, out of the love of your own leisure, you have the right to omit an act of obedience . . . , if you do so, the Bridegroom will not come to repose with you; least of all . . . in this bed, on which you have spread the straw and the nettles of disobedience instead of the flowers of docility. He will not hear your prayers, nor heed your cries, rebel that you are; you will obtain nothing from him who loves obedience so much that he died rather than fail to practice it."²⁶

Penance is also necessary. It is the first impulse that God grants to a sinner who is beginning to turn toward him. It is the "kiss of the feet" of the sinful woman in the Gospel: "Prostrate yourself on

23. Sermon 83:4.

26. Sermon 46:5.

24. Sermon 3:4.

25. Sermon 72:8; 47:2.

the ground, take hold of his feet . . . sprinkle them with your tears and so wash not them but yourself.”²⁷ When one does penance he judges himself, he condemns himself, that he may escape the judgment of God. Although the first virtue on the road back, penance must be practiced during one’s entire life for vices spring up again unceasingly like shoots that have been pruned: “Believe me, after they have been cut down, the senseless shoots sprout again, the vices that have been driven off return . . . the passions, momentarily quieted, are aroused again. . . . So long as you dwell in this body you will be deceived no matter what progress you make if you think your vices are rooted out and not merely controlled.”²⁸

But for St Bernard nothing escapes the influence of love; even penance must be moistened with its balm. Its very name is then different: the ancients call it compunction. This prick of the heart is one of love, a love that suffers because it does not love sufficiently, because it has wounded Love. For Bernard there are two kinds of compunction, the one begotten of sadness over sin and another begotten of joy over having benefited from the divine benignity.²⁹

Chastity, patience, cheerfulness (*hilaritas*), simplicity, purity of heart which allows of no other motive than the pure love of God (*Solum, inquirere Deum propter ipsum solum*), the pursuit of peace, are so many virtues which the seeker after God must practice.³⁰

Bernard insists in a special way upon the necessity of fraternal charity: “Woe to the man who disturbs the bond of unity. . . . I beg you, my brethren, drive far from you so detestable and wicked an evil. . . . Nothing can trouble or deject you so long as peace and fraternal charity reign in your midst. . . . The highest good, the incomparable grace, is love.”³¹

But of all the virtues necessary for the reorientation of love, the most indispensable is humility. It is so inseparable from fraternal charity that it is like another side of that virtue. It is this void in the soul which love fills. There is a direct relation between the lowliness of humility and the reception of the most exalted graces: “Humility

27. Sermon 3:2.

28. Sermon 58:10; 37:1.

29. Sermon 56:7.

30. Sermon 79; 71:3; 57:3; 40:3.

31. Sermon 29:3.

is a great virtue. It so readily attracts the Divine Majesty. It is absolutely necessary for him who wishes to ascend to the lofty mysteries of Divine Love, that he have a low opinion of himself. If he lacks this sure foundation of humility he will fall beneath even his natural dignity.”³²

The soul desirous of God must realize that the divine action comes first if he is to avoid changing great blessings into great spiritual loss: “How often have we not seen the loftiest graces give rise to the worst evils! This happens every time we become proud of the graces we receive and make use of them as if they were not the gifts of the Lord, failing to give glory to him for them. The soul seeks the Word but only because it has been first sought by him.”³³

St Bernard advises also the adoption of certain practices and dispositions of soul which contribute powerfully to the growth of love. The soul must be nourished unceasingly with the Word of God: “In this land of my pilgrimage I have accustomed myself to nourish my soul on the Law and the Prophets, and on the Psalms which speak so beautifully of you; I have run through the pleasant fields of the Gospels and I have sat at the feet of the Apostles. I have profited also from reading the lives and the writings of the saints.”³⁴ St Bernard bases his own teaching on the Fathers and his constant reading of Scripture.³⁵

It is easy to go astray in the ways of the spiritual life so one must strive to remain faithful to the teaching of the Catholic Church and seek advice from learned men who are experienced in these matters: “Let those attend to my words who do not fear doing without a director or master in the spiritual life! How often have we not seen such souls stray dangerously far from the right road? Knowing nothing of the wiles of Satan, after beginning in the spirit they end in the flesh—victims of a shameful temptation and a culpable fall!”³⁶ The loving soul, because it realizes that it aspires to a good beyond its strength, asks help from on high. It must implore grace if it is to follow after Christ and lead a spiritual life.

32. Sermon 34:1.

35. Sermon 51:7.

33. Sermon 84:2f.

36. Sermon 77:6.

34. Sermon 37:7.

It must also be watchful and observe unceasingly the movements of grace. It is to be attentive, prudent, full of solicitude, constantly on the lookout, it observes diligently the least indications of his will: "The soul in love with God knows how to wait humbly and attentively upon him."³⁷ One pays heed to God when he rests in his presence. This is perhaps the most necessary of all the dispositions of the soul: humbly to rest before God. The soul, given up to this occupation, leaving aside all other concerns, awaits the Lord. This attentiveness in pure faith represents great generosity. To this, at least, all are called. It is a most meritorious activity, it demands strength and energy, the energy and strength of love—yet there is no strain. On the contrary, one remains relaxed, receptive; one waits, one loves. When he comes all will be easy: *quid difficile sibi illo comite*.³⁸

There is one condition required for anyone who wishes to surrender to Divine Love: freedom from every purely natural love: "The soul must be in control of its passions if it is to become the dwellingplace of God. . . . Give me a soul who loves God alone and everything else for his sake; which has realized that Christ is the only reason for its existence, a soul whose labors and leisure tend to rest in the presence of God; . . . this soul is worthy of the caresses of the Bridegroom."³⁹

The Way of Faith

It is sufficient, instead of describing all the virtues necessary for a soul in its return to God, to declare simply that it must seek God. The sincerity of this movement of love supposes all the virtues. Seeking after God unifies one's moral life; it engenders a continual spiritual activity, varied according to circumstances. But to seek after God, to realize one's insufficiency, to depend upon the Word, supposes living in a supernatural atmosphere. The great reality of grace is constantly present under all the texts that we have cited.

37. Sermon 57:9.

38. Sermon 58:2.

39. Sermon 69:1.

The entire spiritual edifice rests upon the development in the soul of the theological virtues. Each time that St Bernard speaks of the love of God, he means supernatural charity. Dependence upon the Word and trust in him (*fiducia*) designate hope. But the point of departure for the entire spiritual ascent is faith: "It is living faith which obtains for us the most exalted graces."⁴⁰

Faith gives the most certain knowledge; it touches upon that which sense can never know, which experience cannot give. Faith is sheltered from all error; it lays hold of things invisible; . . . it goes beyond the limits of human reason, the exercise of the natural faculties, and the bounds of experience.⁴¹ St Bernard points out the power of faith: it reaches God himself, and he notes also its purifying character. He places faith above experience, because faith leads beyond all natural knowledge to the obscure vision of God, guiding man through many purifying trials.

Once a soul decides to correspond with grace, it is assaulted by every kind of temptation. Its sensibility is overwhelmed with weariness and torpor, with disgust, sadness, almost despair. Hardness of heart, weakness, rebellion, all the mists of temptation come upon it.⁴² Even God himself is a purifying flame. But that fire which is God comes to consume without grieving; it burns but sweetly, it ravages but glorifies. It is indeed a destroying fire but its destructive action so works upon vices that it pours sweetness into the heart. Every trace of sin and the rust of vice are destroyed by this flame.⁴³

The vicissitudes to which the soul is subjected—brief visits of the Spouse followed by long absences—are directed to this end; the purification of love in the soul by making it live in faith alone: "He leaves quickly. As is his wont, he departs after a brief visitation."⁴⁴

If faith alone attains to God, then those who have no exceptional interior experience are to be consoled. Perhaps graces such as these which are not essential are granted only to the weaker. At all events

40. Sermon 32:8.

41. Sermon 28:9; 53:2.

42. Sermon 15:6; 21:4.

43. Sermon 57:7f.

44. Sermon 51:1.

“let those who do not have such experience believe strongly; they will obtain the effect of these graces by the merit of their faith.”⁴⁵

Sensible Love of Christ's Humanity

St Bernard compares the sinful soul to an unfaithful spouse who is abandoned by her lovers; the motive of her conversion is not a noble one—she is forced to return to her lawful husband. This return to God is possible because human nature, although wounded, retains a likeness to God. Moreover, if such an enterprise is manifestly beyond its strength the help granted it by the Word will supply for this; relying upon him it is able to practice the virtues and so prepare the way for the coming of charity.

It is evident that the road back to God supposes love of Christ. He himself is the indispensable Way by which man goes to the Father. The sensible love in the heart of man for even the body of Christ and all that he has accomplished and taught in the flesh holds too decisive a place in the spiritual doctrine of the Abbot of Clairvaux not to be studied with particular care.

In Bernard, attachment to the humanity of Our Lord is the pivotal point on which depends the reorientation of love; from carnal it will become spiritual, concupiscence will become charity. Sensible emotion—the tenderness which man experiences in meditating upon the sufferings of Christ—is one of the psychological keynotes in Bernard's theory of conversion.⁴⁶

St Bernard does not believe it possible to suppress with impunity the indestructible force of sense love. On the other hand, it would be illusory to believe that even with the help of grace one could quickly succeed in changing carnal into spiritual love. What is to be done? Present to carnal love an object which is proportionate to

45. Sermon 84:7.

46. (Translator's note.) It is clear that the terms “sensible love” and “carnal love” are not used in any unworthy sense, but simply to describe the strongly affective character of the first turning of the soul to God in Bernard's theory of conversion.

it and more delightful than any sinful creature. Had not St Augustine already spoken of the *bona delectio victrix*? Thus Bernard writes: "Your affection for your Lord Jesus should be both tender and intimate, to oppose the sweet enticements of sensual life. Sweetness conquers sweetness as one nail drives out another."⁴⁷ Here is the advantage of attaching one's sense love to the humanity of Christ. It directs the vital strength of such love toward a more attractive sensible object. This new sensible object is the dwellingplace of the divinity, which will gradually reveal itself as it draws the soul into its holiness.

Bernard himself put his teaching into practice at the beginning of his conversion. With fervor and tenderness he meditated upon all the scenes of the life of Christ; it was the "bundle of myrrh" which he placed upon his breast.⁴⁸ Constant meditation upon the liturgical and personal mysteries of Christ is true wisdom, true philosophy, the science of salvation, the royal road.⁴⁹ That is why the name of Jesus is constantly on his tongue, in his heart and on the tip of his pen. The name of Jesus is light, nourishment and medicine for the poor human heart.⁵⁰

Bernard does not accept the idea that the humanity of Jesus is not an object lofty enough for contemplation. He considers such a view a delusion that leads to the snare of spiritual pride. Reflection on the sufferings of Jesus establishes a remarkable confidence in man.⁵¹ The Incarnation of the Word, by likening him to men, has brought him unspeakably close to man: "The soul more willingly recalls the abjection of Christ because through it he has become lovable. This is not only the starting point of our love for him but its entire explanation. God who is love can never cease to love, but if he had not come among us he would never have been loved."⁵²

Bernard recognizes this sensible love of Christ as a great gift of the Holy Spirit, but he sees also that it is not yet perfect love.⁵³ Nevertheless, this sensible love is precious because it drives carnality from hearts and makes man despise the world. It conforms itself to

47. Sermon 20:4.

50. Sermon 15:5.

53. Sermon 20:8.

48. Sermon 43:3.

51. Sermon 61:3, 7.

49. Sermon 43:4.

52. Sermon 70:2.

all that the Church teaches about Christ. It attains perfection by becoming spiritual. Although St Bernard experienced a tender emotion in contemplating the mysteries of Christ he never fell into mere sentimentality. He always perceived the Word through the transparent humanity of Jesus. Here, more than elsewhere, study of his Sermons on the Song of Songs could be rendered more complete by quotations from his other writings. The part played by the Blessed Virgin Mary in working with Christ to direct our love back to God also deserves full treatment.

The Grace of Union—Spiritual Marriage

St Bernard has pointed out the exceptional quality of the grace which the spouse is seeking when she asks a kiss of the Word: a participation in the beatific life of the Trinity. He scarcely ever gives an abstract definition of the spiritual marriage, but rather sets out magnificent descriptions of it. It is an ineffable grace. One's life is dominated and illumined by this unspeakable gift of God.

I confess to you I have many times received the visits of the Word. I could not perceive the exact moment of his arrival. He did not enter by the senses, but whence did he come? Perhaps he did not enter at all, for he who enters comes from without. But I found him closer to me than I to myself. How can I perceive his presence within me? It is full of life and efficacy, and no sooner has he entered than my sluggish soul is awakened. He moves and warms and wounds my heart, hard and stony and sick though it be. It is solely by the movement of my heart that I understand that he is there, and I realize the power of his action when I see my evil tendencies disappear and my carnal affections quieted. . . . Once he leaves, everything falls back into slumber, all grows cold like a boiling pot of oil withdrawn from the fire.⁵⁴

It is difficult for a soul thus visited by Divine Love to give an explanation of its state. Such transports are sometimes expressed in

54. Sermon 74:6f.

words but one is not always master of them. A love that is ardent and vehement bursts forth unrestrainedly and expresses itself without any concern as to the sense and quality of its words.⁵⁵

St Bernard constantly employs the words: *affectio*, *afficere*, *affectus*, to designate in the natural order the emotions or rather passions which "affect" or lay hold of a man. When there is question of one's relations with God, they keep the same meaning with, however, an implication of greater passivity. The two principal affections which he constantly touches upon are fear and love, and to these must be added sadness and joy. While knowledge and understanding are necessary, nonetheless to be converted to God and to walk upon the road that leads to salvation, it is not enough to be instructed, one must also be "affected," i.e., moved or seized by grace. That is why fear, the fear of hell, is the beginning of wisdom and love its consummation.

What place does instruction have in such a system of spirituality? That which is proper to it—to enlighten and form one's judgment. But mere knowledge of the road and the goal is not sufficient. One needs the strength to walk along it and it is "affection" which gives this indispensable help. It is a vital movement. "Up to this point we have listened to Wisdom giving his instruction as from a professor's chair. Now, when fear lays hold of us, his teachings penetrate our souls and shake us to the very depths because we are moved by them (*afficiamur*). The sun does not warm everyone it enlightens. It is not the knowledge of wealth that makes one rich, but its possession. In the same way, it is not the knowledge of God that makes one wise at the outset of the spiritual life, but rather fear because it touches the heart."⁵⁶ Yet it is clear that far more than fear, love takes full possession and makes a man enter into God. This experience is entirely gratuitous. God grants it to whomsoever he pleases, when he pleases, as he pleases.⁵⁷

This grace is rare and of short duration. The life of the mystic is not a continual ecstasy: "Always it is for so short a time! Just as one thinks he has him, he suddenly slips away. If he sometimes

55. Sermon 23:16.

56. Sermon 23:14.

57. Sermon 31:2.

permits himself to be laid hold of, it is not for long. Swiftly he departs as if fleeing from your embrace.”⁵⁸ With the result that in spite of the intensity of this joyous love, its transitory and passing character makes union here below incomplete. However luminous this grace may be, it is enveloped always in darkness. Once the grace is gone, the very thought of it is productive of sorrow rather than consolation. It is only a foretaste, which enkindles a greater longing for heaven. The absences of the Spouse become a purgatory of love.

Under what form is this grace granted the soul? It has often been remarked that Cistercian mysticism knows nothing of seeing visions or other extraordinary phenomena. What Bernard tells of his own experiences indicates that for him ecstasy is before all else an ecstasy of love: “The soul does not deny that it is inebriated but with love, not wine.”⁵⁹ Still he did experience supernatural illumination of the mind: “There are two kinds of rapture in this blissful contemplation. One in the mind and the other in the affection.”⁶⁰

But what does Bernard mean by ecstasy? The outstanding characteristic of this state as he describes it is the exaltation of the soul above all species of the imagination and modes of natural knowledge: “Each time you hear or read that the Word and the soul speak together and gaze upon one another, do not think that there is question of voices heard in the ear or visions seen in the imagination. The speech of the Word is his goodness which grants this grace, and the speech of the soul its ardent love.”⁶¹

The soul loses the remembrance of present things in contemplation; it is freed not only from the attraction of lower and corporeal objects but even from their imaginary representation, that it may enjoy true repose. The purity of the soul must be so great that it is entirely freed of all sense images. In a word, there is nothing of sense or imagination in this communing of God and the soul; instead, it is privileged to receive the Word in the very

58. Sermon 32:2.

59. Sermon 49:1.

60. Sermon 49:4.

61. Sermon 45:7.

depths of its being. He is there, not in figure, but in reality; he cannot be seen, but he reveals his presence by the love he rouses within the soul—*non apparentem, sed efficientem*.⁶²

The Abbot of Clairvaux is familiar with intellectual rapture. Several texts indicate this. The kiss, he tells us, "is an unreserved infusion of joys, a revealing of mysteries, a marvelous and indistinguishable blending of the divine light with the enlightened mind. . . . When all stain of sin and rust of vice have been consumed by this flame and the conscience is cleansed and filled with peace there follow a certain swift and unaccustomed dilation of soul and an inpouring flood of light for the understanding of Scriptures and the penetration of divine mysteries."⁶³

Nonetheless, St Bernard is, above all, an affective genius. Love is his proper domain and it is through love that he attains his loftiest experiences. Here there is no need to search out isolated passages. There is an unlimited supply of them. The abundance of his heart simply pours itself forth.

When love has attained to this purity of soul, the image has regained its likeness to the Word. God is love, pure love, and when the soul by its love for him is perfectly conformed to him, the spiritual marriage is consummated: "Such conformity unites the soul to the Word. Already resembling him by nature, it begins to do so also by will. It loves as it is loved. If it loves God perfectly then it is wed to him. What more sweet than this conformity? What more desirable than this charity which makes it adhere lovingly to the Word?" It is a holy and spiritual marriage contract, rather it is an embrace wherein two wills are united. Two spirits are now but one. The inequality of the spouses does not cripple this harmony of will, for love has no care for reverence: "Love is derived from the verb to love and not from the verb to honor. He who loves, loves and knows nothing else." God, though he deserves to be honored and admired, prefers to be loved: "They are spouses now, and what other bond exists between spouses than that of mutual love?"⁶⁴

62. Sermon 31:6; 2:2.

63. Sermon 57:8.

64. Sermon 83:3.

Here the soul, beside itself with love, enjoys the Word in all security. Sometimes it is withdrawn from its senses, so that it loses all thought of itself, plunged as it is in the loving contemplation of the Word. This occurs when the soul, drawn by the ineffable sweetness of the Word, is in some way snatched from itself and carried above itself to enjoy the Word.

For Bernard of Clairvaux one can find no names more apt to express this mutual relationship of the Word and the soul than those of Bridegroom and bride.

The Effects of Union with God

For St Bernard the first effect of union with God is an ever greater fraternal charity. It is impossible for a soul blest with such a grace to keep to itself the joy it has experienced; it must share it. This love, enkindled by the flame of Divine Love itself, knows no limit and excludes no one. Its field of action starts with benefactors, but includes all one's neighbors and even embraces bitter enemies. It accommodates itself to everyone and makes the feelings of all its own.⁶⁵

But care must be taken to expend upon one's neighbors only that charity which has been received in fullness from God, otherwise our poverty will soon be a burden to others: "Be a reservoir filled with love, and not merely a canal."⁶⁶ That is why the contemplative repose of others, especially of superiors, must be respected, for how shall they help their brothers if they take no care to remain in touch with God and be filled by him with divine charity? The greatest fraternal charity is to teach the true meaning of life after it has been experienced in oneself. "He has brought me into the chamber stored with the wine of his love. . . . I have entered there alone, but not for my utility alone: Each step I take is yours as well; it is for you that I advance. All that I may obtain in abundance from the divine liberality I share with you."⁶⁷

65. Sermon 27:2; 10:2.

66. Sermon 18:3, 6.

67. Sermon 23:2.

There is no need to fear that when it is absorbed with God, a soul will forget its neighbor. On the contrary, God's love is a divine flame that nourishes and enkindles true fraternal charity:⁶⁸ "It is proper to true and pure contemplation that it stir up in the soul such a flame of divine love that it no longer resists the vehement desire to communicate it to others that they too may be consumed by love. Gladly it abandons the holy repose of contemplation in order to give itself to preaching. When its desires are satisfied it returns with so much more ardor to its contemplation. . . . Then once again, having tasted the inebriation of contemplative love, it strives to win souls with its habitual fire and renewed courage."⁶⁹ This was Bernard's own experience: "Patiently I endure being snatched from the unfruitful embrace of Rachel in order that Lia may give me the fruits of your spiritual progress. Prayer . . . reading . . . meditation . . . and other activities are profitable to my spiritual life, but if you summon me from them I give them up as no longer profitable to my soul. . . ."⁷⁰

St Bernard squarely faced up to the problem of the two loves. But the terms we sometimes employ may indicate a false solution. He himself prefers to speak of the *ordo caritatis*, of the order that must be introduced into the exercises of charity. There is only one supernatural love, one which turns both toward God and toward one's neighbor.

In man's growth toward perfect love Bernard distinguishes three kinds of affections: the first is the offspring of the flesh—it does not submit to the divine law. It is pleasant but sinful. The second obeys reason—it is submissive to God. It is strong but dry. It gives rise to good works. It is active charity. The third is seasoned by wisdom. It tastes and savors the ineffable sweetness of God. It is affective charity.⁷¹

The first, evil as it is, has no place here, but there must exist a certain proportion between the other two. It is active charity which is generally the object of the commandments; it merits a reward.

68. Sermon 52:6.

70. Sermon 51:3.

69. Sermon 57:9; 58:1.

71. Sermon 50:4.

The other—*affective charity* which enjoys God—is rather given as a reward. Here below one can experience this joyous love to some extent but its perfection is reserved for heaven.⁷² However when the heart is dry and without love Bernard would not confine it to practicing good works: “One of the worst evils to which men succumb is to be without affection.”⁷³

The two loves are of unequal dignity. It is the objects toward which they tend which make them what they are. Active charity busies itself with more humble tasks, it comes to the aid of others. *Affective charity* has a more elevated object: the enjoyment of God. Bernard obviously gives the preference to the latter love, the love of God. However, in practice, the reverse order may have to be observed. Care of one’s neighbor may be more urgent: “Who will deny that the man who prays is occupied with God? Nonetheless, it often happens that out of respect for the order of charity we must leave this conversation with God on behalf of those who need our help or encouragement. . . . Work in the fields at times obliges us to suppress the High Mass; . . . the right order of things seems reversed, but necessity knows no law, it does not take into account the objective value of things but the urging of human needs.”⁷⁴

Affective charity on the other hand looks to the hierarchy of values. It appreciates things as they are and tastes them in all their fullness. Thanks to such charity, the soul loves God first with all the strength of which a creature is capable, then itself to the extent that it recognizes that it has no value save insofar as it belongs to God; finally, its neighbor, in the measure in which it loves God or is pledged to this love.⁷⁵ Thus understood, *affective charity* is true wisdom, and as such it reaches its full development only in heaven where the problem of the two loves will no longer exist.

The first effect of the grace of union therefore is *fraternal charity*, a fraternal charity which is perfect only when it springs from love of God. We do not understand man—his misery, his needs, his greatness, unless he is seen in the light of the Divine.

72. Sermon 50:2.

73. Sermon 50:4.

74. Sermon 50:5.

75. Sermon 50:6f.

A second effect which should be pointed out, and which is only a particular application of the first, is the goodness, the gentleness, which take possession of a man's heart when it is emptied of self and filled with love through contact with God. This is especially desirable for those to whom the Church confides her authority. In St Bernard's view, the grace of union with God is necessary for superiors, because it is very rash for anyone to pretend to govern his brethren without having experience in the spiritual life: *Nec debet omnino praeesse aliis qui in eam (cellam vinariam) necdum meruit introduci*—"No one should rule over others who has not yet merited to be brought into the wine cellar of divine union."⁷⁶

An unlimited confidence is a third fruit of the grace of union. It is a most beautiful form of the virtue of hope: "An immense confidence is begotten by the familiarity which reigns between the Word and the soul."⁷⁷ And this is why: the soul which loves ardently cannot doubt that it is loved in return. All the sentiments that it feels toward God, its constant attentiveness to him, its unceasing care and fervor in watching for him, its perpetual desire to please him, lead it to believe firmly that God experiences the same love toward it. It knows that his love came first: "Certitude is the fruit of love. The spouse knows that it would never seek God if it had not itself been first sought by him."⁷⁸

Conclusion

We have set forth the doctrine of the restoration of love or, what amounts to the same thing, the recovery of full liberty and the perfect restoration of the image of God in the soul. To base the study of St Bernard on any other foundation would lead to a distortion of his doctrine. The return of love to its source undoubtedly constitutes the basic principle of his teaching.

The interior life of the Abbot of Clairvaux is a perfect illustration of his principles. Just as with the theology of St Paul, his teaching

76. Sermon 23:7.

77. Sermon 69:7.

78. Sermon 84:5.

benefited greatly from his own mystical experience. Still it is astonishing that these intense graces did not so occupy the thoughts of Bernard that he limit himself simply to expounding them. Gifted as he was with a powerful and penetrating mind, he felt the need of justifying his experiences by a doctrinal exposition whose principles were derived chiefly from Scripture, the Fathers of the Church and contemporary investigations into the nature of man. But his genius could not be content with merely reproducing the thought of his predecessors. Rather he assimilated all the influences that he underwent in the measure in which they were compatible with his thought. He lived in an age when the memory—a vital and integral faculty of the soul—had not yet been replaced by a notebook. A literary work in those days was the expression of one's inner life and thought, and not merely the presentation of a simple collection of notes.

The great preoccupation of the thinkers of the twelfth century was the problem of love. Bernard had been matured by contact with God and men. Temperament, external influences, grace—all these carried him to the full development of his personality and made him the master of his age. He went directly to the focal point of man's relationship to God and never ceased to dwell upon it in his works. Love, for him as for St Augustine and St Gregory, is the driving power of the soul.

"This affective examination of the truth gives rise to a presentation whose order consists in the relating of each point to the end, in order to keep that end always to the fore."⁷⁹ Such a method, because of its apparent repetitions, is disconcerting to the logical mind which proceeds toward its end by an ordered series of arguments. Yet there is a remarkable and satisfying unity in the teachings of St Bernard. His works, almost as much as his life, exemplify the meaning of Christ's prayer "that they may be one, Father, even as we are one."⁸⁰ Charity draws all back to unity. By loving God and all things for his sake, the soul becomes one spirit with him, so perfect is its likeness to him.

79. L. Brunschvigg, *Pensées de Pascal* (Paris: Cluny, 1934), p. 110.

80. Jn 17:22.

Once love has recovered its unity, a sovereign liberty is born in the soul. The works of St Bernard, expressive as they are of his own interior life, sing the glories of this freedom from constraint with contagious lyricism. He teaches in his treatise on the degrees of humility that only saints and great sinners know freedom here below: "In the former, perfect love, in the latter consummate evil, casts out all fear. In the former, truth, in the latter, blindness, gives perfect security."⁸¹

The soul thus united with its God, knows no fear, nor any obstacles between its Creator and itself, any division within itself, any separation from its brethren. All its natural and supernatural powers, caught up by love, contribute to its development. Life flows at full tide toward its Source.

Bernard's teaching on love is derived directly from the Song of Songs. But while the sacred writer is preoccupied with the hopes of the chosen people of God for the future, Bernard interprets the Song as expressive of events taking place now, of sorrow and joy experienced now because of the alternating visits of the Word. The sacred nuptial song is one of the greatest biblical revelations of divine love. Although the goodness of God in the Old Testament is linked up with the Covenant, his love was unconditional; it was absolutely gratuitous. It is this utterly spontaneous love of God, who cherished us while as yet we were still his enemies, that won the heart of Bernard: "Your incomprehensible goodness, Lord Jesus, has made us yours."

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81. *The Steps of Humility and Pride*, n. 51 in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 7, Cistercian Fathers Series 19.

SERMON 1

ON THE TITLE OF THE BOOK

THE INSTRUCTIONS THAT I ADDRESS to you, my brothers, will differ from those I should deliver to people in the world, at least the manner will be different. The preacher who desires to follow St Paul's method of teaching will give them milk to drink rather than solid food,¹ and will serve a more nourishing diet to those who are spiritually enlightened: "We teach," he said, "not in the way philosophy is taught, but in the way that the Spirit teaches us: we teach spiritual things spiritually."² And again: "We have a wisdom to offer those who have reached maturity,"³ in whose company, I feel assured, you are to be found, unless in vain have you prolonged your study of divine teaching, mortified your senses, and meditated day and night on God's law.⁴ Be ready then to feed on bread rather than milk. Solomon has bread to give that is splendid and delicious, the bread of that book called the Song of Songs. Let us bring it forth then if you please, and break it.

2. Now, unless I am mistaken, by the grace of God you have understood quite well from the book of Ecclesiastes how to recognize and have done with the false promise of this world. And then the book of Proverbs—has not your life and your conduct been sufficiently amended and enlightened by the doctrine it inculcates? These are two loaves of which it has been your pleasure to taste,

1. 1 Cor 3:1-2; Heb 5:12-14.

2. 1 Cor 2:13.

3. 1 Cor 2:6.

4. Ps 1:2. References to the Psalms are numbered according to the Vulgate version as this was the one familiar to St Bernard.

loaves you have welcomed as coming from the cupboard of a friend.⁵ Now approach for this third loaf that, if possible, you may always recognize what is best.⁶ Since there are two evils that comprise the only, or at least the main, enemies of the soul: a misguided love of the world and an excessive love of self,⁷ the two books previously mentioned can provide an antidote to each of these infections. One uproots pernicious habits of mind and body with the hoe of self-control. The other, by the use of enlightened reason, quickly perceives a delusive tinge in all that the world holds glorious, truly distinguishing between it and deeper truth. Moreover, it causes the fear of God and the observance of his commandments to be preferred to all human pursuits and worldly desires.⁸ And rightly so, for the former is the beginning of wisdom,⁹ the latter its culmination, for there is no true and consummate wisdom other than the avoidance of evil and the doing of good,¹⁰ no one can successfully shun evil without the fear of God, and no work is good without the observance of the commandments.

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

II. Before the flesh has been tamed and the spirit set free by zeal for truth, before the world's glamour and entanglements have been firmly repudiated, it is a rash enterprise on any man's part to presume to study spiritual doctrines. Just as a light is flashed in vain on closed or sightless eyes, so "an unspiritual person cannot accept anything of the Spirit of God."¹¹ For "the Holy Spirit of instruction shuns what is false,"¹² and that is what the life of the intemperate man is. Nor will he ever have a part with the pretensions of the world, since he is the Spirit of Truth.¹³ How can there be harmony between the wisdom that comes down from above and the wisdom of the world,¹⁴ which is foolishness to God, or the wisdom of the flesh

5. Lk 11:5.

6. Phil 1:10.

7. 1 Pet 2:11.

8. Eccles 12:13.

9. Ps 111:10.

10. Ps 36:27; Prov 3:7.

11. 1 Cor 2:14.

12. Wis 1:5.

13. Jn 14:17.

14. Jas 3:17; 1 Cor 3:19.

which is at enmity with God?¹⁵ I am sure that the friend who comes to us on his travels will have no reason to murmur against us after he has shared in this third loaf.

4. But who is going to divide this loaf? The Master of the house is present, it is the Lord you must see in the breaking of the bread.¹⁶ For who else could more fittingly do it? It is a task that I would not dare to arrogate to myself. So look upon me as one from whom you look for nothing. For I myself am one of the seekers, one who begs along with you for the food of my soul, the nourishment of my spirit. Poor and needy, I knock at that door of his which, “when he opens, nobody can close,”¹⁷ that I may find light on the profound mystery to which this discourse leads. Patiently all creatures look to you, O Lord.¹⁸ “Little children go begging for bread; no one spares a scrap for them;”¹⁹ they await it from your merciful love. O God most kind, break your bread for this hungering flock,²⁰ through my hands indeed if it should please you, but with an efficacy that is all your own.

III. 5. Tell us, I beg you, by whom, about whom and to whom it is said: “Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.”²¹ How shall I explain so abrupt a beginning, this sudden irruption as from a speech in mid-course? For the words spring upon us as if indicating one speaker to whom another is replying as she demands a kiss—whichever she may be. But if she asks for or demands a kiss from somebody, why does she distinctly and expressly say *with the mouth*, and even with *his own* mouth, as if lovers should kiss by means other than the mouth, or with mouths other than their own? But yet she does not say: “Let him kiss me *with his mouth*,” what she says is still more intimate: “with the kiss of his mouth.” How delightful a ploy of speech this,²² prompted into life by the kiss, with Scripture’s own engaging countenance inspiring the reader and enticing him on, that he may find pleasure even in the laborious pursuit of what lies hidden, with a fascinating theme to sweeten the fatigue of research. Surely this mode of beginning that is not a

15. Rom 8:7.

16. Lk 24:35.

17. Rev 3:7.

18. Ps 144:15.

19. Lam 4:4.

20. Is 58:7.

21. Song 1:1.

22. Ps 103:34.

beginning, this novelty of diction in a book so old, cannot but increase the reader's attention. It must follow too that this work was composed, not by any human skill but by the artistry of the Spirit, difficult to understand indeed but yet enticing one to investigate.

IV. 6. So now what shall we do? Shall we by-pass the title? No, not even one iota may be omitted,²³ since we are commanded to gather up the tiniest fragments lest they be lost.²⁴ The title runs: "The beginning of Solomon's Song of Songs." First of all take note of the appropriateness of the name "Peaceful," that is, Solomon, at the head of a book which opens with the token of peace, with a kiss. Take note too that by this kind of opening only men of peaceful minds, men who can achieve mastery over the turmoil of the passions and the distracting burden of daily chores, are invited to the study of this book.

7. Again, the title is not simply the word "Song," but "Song of Songs," a detail not without significance. For though I have read many songs in the Scriptures, I cannot recall any that bear such a name. Israel chanted a song to Yahweh²⁵ celebrating his escape from the sword and the tyranny of Pharaoh, and the twofold good fortune that simultaneously liberated and avenged him in the Red Sea. Yet even though chanted, this has not been called a "Song of Songs"; Scripture, if my memory serves me right, introduces it with the words: "Israel sang this song in honor of Yahweh."²⁶ Song poured from the lips of Deborah,²⁷ of Judith,²⁸ of the mother of Samuel,²⁹ of several of the prophets,³⁰ yet none of these songs is styled a "Song of Songs." You will find that all of them, as far as I can see, were inspired to song because of favors to themselves or to their people, songs for a victory won, for an escape from danger or the gaining of a boon long sought. They would not be found ungrateful for the divine beneficence, so all sang for reasons proper to each, in accord with the Psalmist's words: "He gives thanks to you, O God, for blessing him."³¹ But King Solomon himself,

23. Mt 5:18.

26. Ex 15:1.

29. 1 Sam 2:1.

24. Jn 6:12.

27. Judg 5:1.

30. Cf. Is 5:1-2; 26:1-10.

25. Ex 15:1-19.

28. Jud 16:1.

31. Ps 48:19.

unique as he was in wisdom, renowned above all men, abounding in wealth, secure in his peace, stood in no need of any particular benefit that would have inspired him to sing those songs. Nor does Scripture in any place attribute such a motive to him.

8. We must conclude then it was a special divine impulse that inspired these songs of his that now celebrate the praises of Christ and his Church, the gift of holy love, the sacrament of endless union with God. Here too are expressed the mounting desires of the soul, its marriage song, an exultation of spirit poured forth in figurative language pregnant with delight. It is no wonder that like Moses he put a veil on his face,³² equally resplendent as it must have been in this encounter, because in those days few if any could sustain the bright vision of God's glory.³³ Accordingly, because of its excellence, I consider this nuptial song to be well deserving of the title that so remarkably designates it, the Song of Songs, just as he in whose honor it is sung is uniquely proclaimed King of kings and Lord of lords.³⁴

V. 9. Furthermore if you look back on your own experience, is it not in that victory by which your faith overcomes the world,³⁵ in "your exit from the horrible pit and out of the slough of the marsh,"³⁶ that you yourselves sing a new song to the Lord for all the marvels he has performed?³⁷ Again, when he purposed to "settle your feet on a rock and to direct your steps,"³⁸ then too, I feel certain, a new song was sounding on your lips, a song to our God for his gracious renewal of your life. When you repented he not only forgave your sins but even promised rewards, so that rejoicing in the hope³⁹ of benefits to come, you sing of the Lord's ways: how great is the glory of the Lord!⁴⁰ And when, as happens, texts of Scripture hitherto dark and impenetrable at last become bright with meaning for you, then, in gratitude for this nurturing bread of heaven you must charm the ears of God with a voice of exultation and praise, a festal song.⁴¹ In the daily trials and combats

32. Ex 34:33; 2 Cor 3:13.

33. 2 Cor 3:18.

34. 1 Tim 6:15.

35. 1 Jn 5:4.

36. Ps 39:3.

37. Ps 97:1.

38. Ps 39:3-4.

39. Rom 12:12.

40. Ps 137:5.

41. Ps 41:5.

arising from the flesh, the world and the devil, that are never wanting to those who live devout lives in Christ,⁴² you learn by what you experience that man's life on earth is a ceaseless warfare,⁴³ and are impelled to repeat your songs day after day for every victory won. As often as temptation is overcome, an immoral habit brought under control, an impending danger shunned, the trap of the seducer detected, when a passion long indulged is finally and perfectly allayed, or a virtue persistently desired and repeatedly sought is ultimately obtained by God's gift; so often, in the words of the prophet, let thanksgiving and joy resound.⁴⁴ For every benefit conferred, God is to be praised in his gifts. Otherwise when the time of judgment comes, that man will be punished as an ingrate who cannot say to God: "Your statutes were my song in the land of exile."⁴⁵

10. Again I think that your own experience reveals to you the meaning of those psalms, which are called not Songs of Songs but Songs of the Steps, in that each one, at whatever stage of growth he be, in accord with the upward movements of his heart⁴⁶ may choose one of these songs to praise and give glory to him who empowers you to advance. I don't know how else these words could be true: "There are shouts of joy and victory in the tents of the just."⁴⁷ And still more that beautiful and salutary exhortation of the Apostle: "With psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles, singing and chanting to the Lord in your hearts."⁴⁸

VI. 11. But there is that other song which, by its unique dignity and sweetness, excels all those I have mentioned and any others there might be; hence by every right do I acclaim it as the Song of Songs. It stands at a point where all the others culminate. Only the touch of the Spirit⁴⁹ can inspire a song like this, and only personal experience can unfold its meaning. Let those who are versed in the mystery revel in it; let all others burn with desire rather to attain to this experience than merely to learn about it. For it is not a melody that

42. 2 Tim 3:12.

45. Ps 118:54.

48. Eph 5:19.

43. Job 7:1.

46. Ps 83:6.

49. Cf. 1 Jn 2:27.

44. Is 51:3.

47. Ps 117:15.

resounds abroad but the very music of the heart, not a trilling on the lips but an inward pulsing of delight, a harmony not of voices but of wills. It is a tune you will not hear in the streets, these notes do not sound where crowds assemble;⁵⁰ only the singer hears it and the one to whom he sings—the lover and the beloved. It is pre-eminently a marriage song telling of chaste souls in loving embrace, of their wills in sweet concord, of the mutual exchange of the heart's affections.

12. The novices, the immature, those but recently converted from a worldly life, do not normally sing this song or hear it sung. Only the mind disciplined by persevering study, only the man whose efforts have borne fruit under God's inspiration, the man whose years, as it were, make him ripe for marriage—years measured out not in time but in merits—only he is truly prepared for nuptial union with the divine partner, a union we shall describe more fully in due course.⁵¹ But the hour has come when both our rule and the poverty of our state demand that we go out to work.⁵² Tomorrow,⁵³ with God's help, we shall continue to speak about the kiss, because today's discourse on the title sets us free to resume where we had begun.

50. Is 42:2.

51. See Sermon 83.

52. *St. Benedict's Rule for Monasteries* (hereafter RB), c. 48.

53. The early Cistercians gathered daily in chapter after prime to receive instruction from the Abbot. See *Consuetudines* of 1152, Part I, *Officia Ecclesiastica*, c. 70 in *Nomasticon Cisterciense*, ed. Séjalon (Solesmes, 1892), p. 147. It is in this context that St Bernard places his Sermons. See J. Leclercq, Introduction, *Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 3 (Cistercian Fathers Series 7).

SERMON 2

VARIOUS MEANINGS OF THE KISS

DURING MY FREQUENT PONDERINGS on the burning desire with which the patriarchs longed for the incarnation of Christ, I am stung with sorrow and shame. Even now I can scarcely restrain my tears, so filled with shame am I by the lukewarmness, the frigid unconcern of these miserable times. For which of us does the consummation of that event fill with as much joy as the mere promise of it inflamed the desires of the holy men of pre-christian times? Very soon now there will be great rejoicing as we celebrate the feast of Christ's birth.¹ But how I wish it were inspired by his birth! All the more therefore do I pray that the intense longing of those men of old, their heartfelt expectation, may be enkindled in me by these words: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth."² Many an upright man in those far-off times sensed within himself how profuse the graciousness that would be poured upon those lips.³ And intense desire springing from that perception⁴ impelled him to utter: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth," hoping with every fiber of his being that he might not be deprived of a share in a pleasure so great.

2. The conscientious man of those days might repeat to himself: "Of what use to me the wordy effusions of the prophets? Rather let him who is the most handsome of the sons of men,⁵ let him kiss me

1. Bernard places this Sermon in the context of Advent whose liturgy has undoubtedly influenced its thought.

2. Song 1:1.

3. Ps 44:3.

4. Is 26:8.

5. Ps 44:3.

with the kiss of his mouth. No longer am I satisfied to listen to Moses, for he is a slow speaker and not able to speak well.⁶ Isaiah is 'a man of unclean lips,'⁷ Jeremiah does not know how to speak, he is a child;⁸ not one of the prophets makes an impact on me with his words. But he, the one whom they proclaim, let him speak to me, 'let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.' I have no desire that he should approach me in their person, or address me with their words, for they are 'a watery darkness, a dense cloud';⁹ rather in his own person 'let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth'; let him whose presence is full of love, from whom exquisite doctrines flow in streams, let him become 'a spring inside me, welling up to eternal life.'¹⁰ Shall I not receive a richer infusion of grace from him whom the Father has anointed with the oil of gladness above all his rivals,¹¹ provided that he will bestow on me the kiss of his mouth? For his living, active word¹² is to me a kiss, not indeed an adhering of the lips that can sometimes belie a union of hearts, but an unreserved infusion of joys, a revealing of mysteries, a marvellous and indistinguishable mingling of the divine light with the enlightened mind, which, joined in truth to God, is one spirit with him.¹³ With good reason then I avoid trucking with visions and dreams; I want no part with parables and figures of speech; even the very beauty of the angels can only leave me wearied. For my Jesus utterly surpasses these in his majesty and splendor.¹⁴ Therefore I ask of him what I ask of neither man nor angel: that he kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.

II. Note how I do not presume that it is with his mouth I shall be kissed, for that constitutes the unique felicity and singular privilege of the human nature he assumed. No, in the consciousness of my lowliness I ask to be kissed with the kiss of his mouth, an experience shared by all who are in a position to say: 'Indeed from his fullness we have, all of us, received.' "¹⁵

3. I must ask you to try to give your whole attention here. The

6. Ex 4:10.

7. Is 6:5.

8. Jn 1:6.

9. Ps 17:12.

10. Jn 4:14.

11. Ps 44:8.

12. Heb 4:12.

13. 1 Cor 6:17.

14. Ps 44:5.

15. Jn 1:16.

mouth that kisses signifies the Word who assumes human nature; the nature assumed receives the kiss; the kiss however, that takes its being both from the giver and the receiver, is a person that is formed by both, none other than "the one mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Christ Jesus."¹⁶ It is for this reason that none of the saints dared say: "let him kiss me with his mouth," but rather, "with the kiss of his mouth." In this way they paid tribute to that prerogative of Christ, on whom uniquely and in one sole instance the mouth of the Word was pressed, that moment when the fullness of the divinity yielded itself to him¹⁷ as the life of his body. A fertile kiss therefore, a marvel of stupendous self-abasement that is not a mere pressing of mouth upon mouth; it is the uniting of God with man. Normally the touch of lip on lip is the sign of the loving embrace of hearts, but this conjoining of natures brings together the human and divine, shows God reconciling "to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven."¹⁸ "For he is the peace between us, and has made the two into one."¹⁹ This was the kiss for which just men yearned under the old dispensation, foreseeing as they did that in him they would "find happiness and a crown of rejoicing,"²⁰ because in him were hidden "all the jewels of wisdom and knowledge."²¹ Hence their longing to taste that fullness of his.²²

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

III. Even the holy men who lived before the coming of Christ understood that God had in mind plans of peace for the human race.²³ "Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants, the prophets."²⁴ What he did reveal however was obscure to many.²⁵ For in those days faith was a rare thing on the earth, and hope but a faint impulse in the heart even of many of those who looked forward to the deliverance of Israel.²⁶ Those indeed who foreknew also proclaimed that Christ would come as

16. 1 Tim 2:5.

19. Eph 2:14.

22. Jn 1:16.

25. Lk 18:34.

17. Col 2:9.

20. Sir 15:6.

23. Jer 29:11.

26. Lk 2:38.

18. Col 1:20.

21. Col 2:3.

24. Amos 3:7.

man, and with him, peace. One of them actually said: "He himself will be peace in our land when he comes."²⁷ Enlightened from above they confidently spread abroad the message that through him men would be restored to the favor of God. John, the fore-runner of the Lord, recognizing the fulfillment of that prophecy in his own time, declared: "Grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ."²⁸ In our time every christian can discover by experience that this is true.

5. In those far-off days however, while the prophets continued to foretell the covenant, and its author continued to delay his coming,²⁹ the faith of the people never ceased to waver because there was no one who could redeem or save.³⁰ Hence men grumbled at the postponements of the coming of this Prince of Peace³¹ so often proclaimed by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times.³² As doubts about the fulfillment of the prophecies began to recur, all the more eagerly did they make demands for the kiss, the sign of the promised reconciliation. It was as if a voice from among the people would challenge the prophets of peace: "How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense?³³ You are always foretelling a peace that is never realized; you promise a world of good but trouble on trouble comes.³⁴ At various times in the past and in various different ways³⁵ this same hope was fostered by angels among our ancestors, who in turn have passed the tidings on to us.³⁶ 'Peace! Peace!' they say, 'but there is no peace.'³⁷ If God desires to convince me of that benevolent will of his, so often vouched for by the prophets but not yet revealed by the event, then let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, and so by this token of peace make my peace secure. For how shall I any longer put my trust in mere words? It is necessary now that words be vindicated by action. If those men are God's envoys let him prove the truth of their words by his own advent, so often the keynote of their predictions, because unless he comes they can do nothing.³⁸ He

27. Mic 5:5. St Bernard's text may be a free rendering or taken from a lost ms.

28. Jn 1:17.

29. Mt 25:5.

30. Ps 7:3.

31. Is 9:6.

32. Lk 1:70.

33. Jn 10:24.

34. Jer 14:19.

35. Heb 1:1.

36. Ps 43:2.

37. Jer 6:14.

38. Jn 15:5.

sent his servant bearing a staff, but neither voice nor life is forthcoming.³⁹ I do not rise up, I am not awakened, I am not shaken out of the dust,⁴⁰ nor do I breathe in hope, if the Prophet himself does not come down and kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.”

6. Here we must add that he who professes to be our mediator with God is God's own Son, and he is God. But what is man that he should take notice of him, the son of man that he should be concerned about him?⁴¹ Where shall such as I am find the confidence, the daring, to entrust myself to him who is so majestic? How shall I, mere dust and ashes, presume that God takes an interest in me?⁴² He is entirely taken up with loving his Father, he has no need of me nor of what I possess.⁴³ How then shall I find assurance that if he is my mediator he will never fail me? If it be really true, as you prophets have said, that God has determined to show mercy, to reveal himself in a more favorable light,⁴⁴ let him establish a covenant of peace,⁴⁵ an everlasting covenant with me⁴⁶ by the kiss of his mouth. If he will not revoke his given word,⁴⁷ let him empty himself,⁴⁸ let him humble himself, let him bend to me and kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. If the mediator is to be acceptable to both parties, equally dependable in the eyes of both, then let him who is God's Son become man, let him become the Son of Man, and fill me with assurance by this kiss of his mouth. When I come to recognize that he is truly mine, then I shall feel secure in welcoming the Son of God as mediator. Not even a shadow of mistrust can then exist, for after all he is my brother, and my own flesh.⁴⁹ It is impossible that I should be spurned by him who is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh.⁵⁰

7. We should by now have come to understand how the discontent of our ancestors displayed a need for this sacrosanct kiss, that is, the mystery of the incarnate Word, for faith, hard-pressed throughout the ages with trouble upon trouble, was ever on the point of failing, and a fickle people, yielding to discouragement,

39. 2 Kings 4:26-31.

42. Sir 10:9.

45. Sir 45:30.

48. Phil 2:7.

40. Is 52:2.

43. Ps 15:2.

46. Is 61:8.

49. Gen 37:27.

41. Ps 143:3.

44. Ps 76:8.

47. Ps 88:35.

50. Gen 2:23.

murmured against the promises of God. Is this a mere improvisation on my part? I suggest that you will find it to be the teaching of the Scriptures: for instance, consider the burden of complaint and murmuring in those words: "Order on order, order on order, rule on rule, rule on rule, a little here, a little there."⁵¹ Or those prayerful exclamations, troubled yet loyal: "Give those who wait for you their reward, and let your prophets be proved worthy of belief."⁵² Again: "Bring about what has been prophesied in your name."⁵³ There too you will find those soothing promises, full of consolation: "Behold the Lord will appear and he will not lie. If he seems slow, wait for him, for he will surely come and he will not delay."⁵⁴ Likewise: "His time is close at hand when he will come and his days will not be prolonged."⁵⁵ Speaking in the name of him who is promised the prophet announces: "Behold I am coming towards you like a river of peace, and like a stream in spate with the glory of the nations."⁵⁶ In all these statements there is evidence both of the urgency of the preachers and of the distrust of those who listened to them. The people murmured, their faith wavered, and in the words of Isaiah: "the ambassadors of peace weep bitterly."⁵⁷ Therefore because Christ was late in coming,⁵⁸ and the whole human race in danger of being lost in despair, so convinced was it that human weakness was an object of contempt with no hope of the reconciliation with God through a grace so frequently promised, those good men whose faith remained strong eagerly longed for the more powerful assurance that only his human presence could convey. They prayed intensely for a sign that the covenant was about to be restored for the sake of a spiritless, faithless people.

8. Oh root of Jesse, that stands as a signal to the peoples,⁵⁹ how many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, and never saw it!⁶⁰

IV. Happy above them all is Simeon, by God's mercy still bearing fruit in old age!⁶¹ He rejoiced to think that he would see

51. Is 28:10.

52. Sir 36:18.

53. Sir 36:17.

54. Heb 2:3.

55. Is 14:1.

56. Is 66:12.

57. Is 33:7.

58. Mt 25:5.

59. Is 11:10.

60. Lk 10:24.

61. Ps 91:14.

the long-desired sign. He saw it and was glad;⁶² and having received the kiss of peace he is allowed to go in peace, but not before he had told his audience that Jesus was born to be a sign that would be rejected.⁶³ Time proved how true this was. No sooner had the sign of peace arisen than it was opposed, by those, that is, who hated peace;⁶⁴ for his peace is with men of good-will,⁶⁵ but for the evil-minded he is "a stone to stumble over, a rock to bring men down."⁶⁶ Herod accordingly was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem.⁶⁷ Christ "came to his own domain, and his own people did not accept him."⁶⁸ Those shepherds, however, who kept watch over their flocks by night,⁶⁹ were fortunate for they were gladdened by a vision of this sign. Even in those early days he was hiding these things from the learned and the clever, and revealing them to mere children.⁷⁰ Herod, as you know, desired to see him,⁷¹ but because his motive was not genuine he did not succeed. The sign of peace was given only to men of good-will, hence to Herod and others like him was given the sign of the prophet Jonah.⁷² The angel said to the shepherds: "Here is a sign for you,"⁷³ you who are humble, obedient, not given to haughtiness,⁷⁴ faithful to prayer and meditating day and night on God's law.⁷⁵ "This is a sign for you," he said. What sign? The sign promised by the angels, sought after by the people, foretold by the prophets; this is the sign that the Lord Jesus has now brought into existence and revealed to you, a sign by which the incredulous are made believers, the dispirited are made hopeful and the fervent achieve security. This therefore is the sign for you. But as a sign what does it signify? It reveals mercy, grace, peace, the peace that has no end.⁷⁶ And finally, the sign is this: "You will find a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."⁷⁷ God himself, however, is in this baby, reconciling the world to himself.⁷⁸ He will be put to death for your sins and raised

62. Jn 8:56.

65. Lk 2:14.

68. Jn 1:11.

71. Lk 23:8.

74. Rom 12:16.

77. Lk 2:12.

63. Lk 2:25-34.

66. 1 Pet 2:8.

69. Lk 2:8-20.

72. Mt 12:19.

75. Ps 1:2.

78. 2 Cor 5:19.

64. Ps 119:7.

67. Mt 2:3.

70. Mt 11:25; Lk 10:21.

73. Lk 2:12.

76. Is 9:7.

to life to justify you,⁷⁹ so that made righteous by faith you may be at peace with God.⁸⁰ This was the sign of peace that the Prophet once urged King Achez to ask of the Lord his God, "either from the depths of Sheol or from the heights above."⁸¹ But the ungodly king refused. His wretched state blinded him to the belief that in this sign the highest things above would be joined to the lowest things below in peace. This was achieved when Christ, descending into Sheol, saluted its dwellers with a holy kiss,⁸² the pledge of peace, and then going up to heaven, enabled the spirits there to share in the same pledge in joy without end.

9. I must end this sermon. But let me sum up briefly the points we have raised. It would seem that this holy kiss was of necessity bestowed on the world for two reasons. Without it the faith of those who wavered would not have been strengthened, nor the desires of the fervent appeased. Moreover, this kiss is no other than the Mediator between God and man, himself a man, Christ Jesus,⁸³ who with the Father and Holy Spirit lives and reigns as God for ever and ever. Amen.

79. Rom 4:25.

82. 1 Cor 16:20.

80. Rom 5:1.

83. 1 Tim 2:5.

81. Is 7:11.

SERMON 3

THE KISS OF THE LORD'S FEET, HANDS AND MOUTH

TODAY THE TEXT WE ARE TO STUDY is the book of our own experience. You must therefore turn your attention inwards, each one must take note of his own particular awareness of the things I am about to discuss. I am attempting to discover if any of you has been privileged to say from his heart: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth."¹ Those to whom it is given to utter these words sincerely are comparatively few, but any one who has received this mystical kiss from the mouth of Christ at least once, seeks again that intimate experience, and eagerly looks for its frequent renewal. I think that nobody can grasp what it is except the one who receives it. For it is "a hidden manna,"² and only he who eats it still hungers for more.³ It is "a sealed fountain"⁴ to which no stranger has access; only he who drinks still thirsts for more.⁵ Listen to one who has had the experience, how urgently he demands: "Be my savior again, renew my joy."⁶ But a soul like mine, burdened with sins, still subject to carnal passions,⁷ devoid of any knowledge of spiritual delights, may not presume to make such a request, almost totally unacquainted as it is with the joys of the supernatural life.

2. I should like however to point out to persons like this that there is an appropriate place for them on the way of salvation. They

1. Song 1:1.

2. Rev 2:17.

3. Sir 24:29.

4. Song 4:12.

5. Sir 24:29.

6. Ps 50:14.

7. 2 Tim 3:6.

may not rashly aspire to the lips of a most benign Bridegroom, but let them prostrate with me in fear at the feet of a most severe Lord. Like the publican full of misgiving,⁸ they must turn their eyes to the earth rather than up to heaven. Eyes that are accustomed only to darkness will be dazzled by the brightness of the spiritual world,⁹ overpowered by its splendor, repulsed by its peerless radiance and whelmed again in a gloom more dense than before. All you who are conscious of sin, do not regard as unworthy and despicable that position where the holy sinner laid down her sins, and put on the garment of holiness. There the Ethiopian changed her skin,¹⁰ and, cleansed to a new brightness, could confidently and legitimately respond to those who insulted her:¹¹ "I am black but lovely, daughters of Jerusalem."¹² You may ask what skill enabled her to accomplish this change, or on what grounds did she merit it? I can tell you in a few words. She wept bitterly,¹³ she sighed deeply from her heart, she sobbed with a repentance that shook her very being, till the evil that inflamed her passions was cleansed away. The heavenly physician came with speed to her aid, because "his word runs swiftly."¹⁴ Perhaps you think the Word of God is not a medicine? Surely it is, a medicine strong and pungent, testing the mind and the heart.¹⁵ "The Word of God is something alive and active. It cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely. It can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or the joints from the marrow: it can judge the secret thoughts."¹⁶ It is up to you, wretched sinner, to humble yourself as this happy penitent did so that you may be rid of your wretchedness.¹⁷ Prostrate yourself on the ground, take hold of his feet, soothe them with kisses, sprinkle them with your tears and so wash not them but yourself. Thus you will become one of the "flock of shorn ewes as they come up from the washing."¹⁸ But even then you may not dare to lift up a face suffused with shame and grief, until you hear the sentence: "Your sins are forgiven,"¹⁹ to be

8. Lk 18:13.

11. Ps 118:42.

14. Ps 147:15.

17. Lk 7:37ff.

9. Prov 25:27.

12. Song 1:4.

15. Ps 7:10.

18. Song 4:2.

10. Jer 13:23.

13. Lk 22:62.

16. Heb 4:12.

19. Lk 7:48.

followed by the summons: "Awake, awake, captive daughter of Sion, awake, shake off the dust."²⁰

II. 3. Though you have made a beginning by kissing the feet, you may not presume to rise at once by impulse to the kiss of the mouth; there is a step to be surmounted in between, an intervening kiss on the hand for which I offer the following explanation. If Jesus says to me: "Your sins are forgiven," what will it profit me if I do not cease from sinning? I have taken off my tunic, am I to put it on again?²¹ And if I do, what have I gained? If I soil my feet again after washing them, is the washing of any benefit? Long did I lie in the slough of the marsh,²² filthy with all kinds of vices; if I return to it again I shall be worse than when I first wallowed in it. On top of that I recall that he who healed me said to me as he exercised his mercy: "Now you are well again, be sure not to sin any more, or something worse may happen to you."²³ He, however, who gave me the grace to repent, must also give me the power to persevere, lest by repeating my sins I should end up by being worse than I was before.²⁴ Woe to me then, repentant though I be, if he without whom I can do nothing²⁵ should suddenly withdraw his supporting hand. I really mean nothing; of myself I can achieve neither repentance nor perseverance, and for that reason I pay heed to the Wise Man's advice: "Do not repeat yourself at your prayers."²⁶ The Judge's threat to the tree that did not yield good fruit is another thing that makes me fearful.²⁷ For these various reasons I must confess that I am not entirely satisfied with the first grace by which I am enabled to repent of my sins; I must have the second as well, and so bear fruits that befit repentance,²⁸ that I may not return like the dog to its vomit.²⁹

4. I am now able to see what I must seek for and receive before I may hope to attain to a higher and holier state.³⁰ I do not wish to be suddenly on the heights, my desire is to advance by degrees.

20. Is 52:1-2.

23. Jn 5:14.

26. Sir 7:15.

29. Prov 26:11.

21. Song 5:3.

24. Lk 11:26.

27. Mt 3:10.

30. Mt 7:8.

22. Ps 39:3.

25. Jn 15:5.

28. Lk 3:8.

The impudence of the sinner displeases God as much as the modesty of the penitent gives him pleasure. You will please him more readily if you live within the limits proper to you, and do not set your sights at things beyond you.³¹ It is a long and formidable leap from the foot to the mouth, a manner of approach that is not commendable. Consider for a moment: still tarnished as you are with the dust of sin, would you dare touch those sacred lips? Yesterday you were lifted from the mud, today you wish to encounter the glory of his face? No, his hand must be your guide to that end. First it must cleanse your stains, then it must raise you up. How raise you? By giving you the grace to dare to aspire. You wonder what this may be. I see it as the grace of the beauty of temperance and the fruits that befit repentance,³² the works of the religious man. These are the instruments that will lift you from the dunghill³³ and cause your hopes to soar. On receiving such a grace then, you must kiss his hand, that is, you must give glory to his name, not to yourself.³⁴ First of all you must glorify him because he has forgiven your sins, secondly because he has adorned you with virtues. Otherwise you will need a bold front to face reproaches such as these: "What do you have that was not given to you? And if it was given, how can you boast as though it were not?"³⁵

III. 5. Once you have had this twofold experience of God's benevolence in these two kisses, you need no longer feel abashed in aspiring to a holier intimacy. Growth in grace brings expansion of confidence. You will love with greater ardor, and knock on the door with greater assurance, in order to gain what you perceive to be still wanting to you. "The one who knocks will always have the door opened to him."³⁶ It is my belief that to a person so disposed, God will not refuse that most intimate kiss of all, a mystery of supreme generosity and ineffable sweetness. You have seen the way that we must follow, the order of procedure: first, we cast ourselves at his feet, we weep before the Lord who made us,³⁷

31. Sir 3:22.

32. Lk 3:8.

33. Ps 112:7.

34. Ps 113:9.

35. 1 Cor 4:7.

36. Lk 11:10.

37. Ps 94:6.

deploring the evil we have done. Then we reach out for the hand that will lift us up, that will steady our trembling knees.³⁸ And finally, when we shall have obtained these favors through many prayers and tears, we humbly dare to raise our eyes to his mouth, so divinely beautiful, not merely to gaze upon it, but—I say it with fear and trembling—to receive its kiss. “Christ the Lord is a Spirit before our face,”³⁹ and he who is joined to him in a holy kiss⁴⁰ becomes through his good pleasure, one spirit with him.⁴¹

6. To you, Lord Jesus, how truly my heart has said: “My face looks to you. Lord, I do seek your face.”⁴² In the dawn you brought me proof of your love,⁴³ in my first approach to kiss your revered feet you forgave my evil ways as I lay in the dust. With the advancement of the day you gave your servant reason to rejoice⁴⁴ when, in the kiss of the hand, you imparted the grace to live rightly. And now what remains, O good Jesus, except that suffused as I am with the fullness of your light, and while my spirit is fervent, you would graciously bestow on me the kiss of your mouth, and give me unbounded joy in your presence.⁴⁵ Serenely lovable above all others, tell me where will you lead your flock to graze, where will you rest it at noon?⁴⁶ Dear brothers, surely it is wonderful for us to be here,⁴⁷ but the burden of the day calls us elsewhere. These guests, whose arrival has just now been announced to us, compel me to break off rather than to conclude a talk that I enjoy so much. So I go to meet the guests, to make sure that the duty of charity, of which we have been speaking, may not suffer neglect, that we may not hear it said of us: “They do not practice what they preach.”⁴⁸ Do you pray in the meantime that God may accept the homage of my lips⁴⁹ for your spiritual welfare, and for the praise and glory of his name.⁵⁰

38. Is 35:3.

39. Lam 4:20. St Bernard's Latin version seems close to the Greek Septuagint version. It may be from the Itala or some ms no longer available.

40. 1 Cor 16:20.

41. 1 Cor 6:17.

42. Ps 26:8.

43. Ps 142:8.

44. Ps 85:4.

45. Ps 15:11.

46. Song 1:6.

47. Lk 9:33.

48. Mt 23:3.

49. Ps 118:108.

50. 1 Pet 1:7.

SERMON 4

THE KISS OF THE LORD'S FEET, HANDS AND MOUTH

YESTERDAY OUR TALK dealt with three stages of the soul's progress under the figure of the three kisses. You still remember this, I hope, for today I intend to continue that same discussion, according as God in his goodness may provide for one so needy.¹ We said, as you remember, that these kisses were given to the feet, the hand and the mouth, in that order. The first is the sign of a genuine conversion of life, the second is accorded to those making progress, the third is the experience of only a few of the more perfect. The book of Scripture that we have undertaken to expound begins with this last kiss, but I have added the other two in the hope that you will attain a better understanding of the last. I leave it to you to judge whether this was necessary, but I do really think that the very nature of the discourse clearly suggests that they be included. And I should be surprised if you did not see that she who said: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth,"² wished to make a distinction between the kiss of the mouth and another or several other kisses. It might have been enough for her to have said simply: "Let him kiss me." Why then should she distinctly and pointedly add: "with the kiss of his mouth," a usage that is certainly not customary? Is it not that she wished to indicate that this kiss at the summit of love's intimacy is not the sole one? People normally say, do they not: "Kiss me," or "Give me a kiss"? Nobody adds the words: "with your mouth," or, "with the kiss of

1. Ps 67:11.

2. Song 1:1.

your mouth." When we wish to kiss somebody, we do not have to state explicitly what we want when we offer our lips to each other. For example, St John's story of Christ's reception of the traitor's kiss simply says: "He kissed him,"³ without adding "with his mouth or with the kiss of his mouth." This is normal procedure then both in speech and in writing. We have here three stages of the soul's growth in love, three stages of its advance toward perfection that are sufficiently known and intelligible to those who have experienced them. There is first the forgiveness of sins, then the grace that follows on good deeds, and finally that contemplative gift by which a kind and beneficent Lord shows himself to the soul with as much clarity as bodily frailty can endure.

2. Perhaps I should here attempt a better explanation of my reason for calling the first two favors kisses. We all know that the kiss is a sign of peace. If what Scripture says is true: "Our iniquities have made a gulf between us and God,"⁴ then peace can be attained only when the intervening gulf is bridged. When therefore we make satisfaction and become reconciled by the re-joining of the cleavage caused by sin, in what better way can I describe the favor we receive than as a kiss of peace? Nor is there a more becoming place for this kiss than at the feet; the amends we make for the pride of our transgressions ought to be humble and diffident.

II. 3. But when God endows us with the more ample grace of a sweet friendship with him, in order to enable us to live with a virtue that is worthy of such a relationship, we tend to raise our heads from the dust with a greater confidence for the purpose of kissing, as is the custom, the hand of our benefactor. It is essential however that we should not make this favor the occasion of self-glorification, we must give the glory to him from whom it comes. For if you glory in yourself rather than in the Lord,⁵ it is your own hand that you kiss, not his, which, according to the words of Job, is the greatest evil and a denial of God.⁶ If therefore, as Scripture suggests, the

3. Mk 14:45.

4. Is 59:2.

5. I Cor 1:31.

6. Job 31:28. See the note on this verse in the *Jerusalem Bible* (hereafter JB) (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), note f, p. 763.

seeking of one's own glory⁷ is like kissing one's own hand, then he who gives glory to God⁸ is quite properly said to be kissing God's hand. We see this to be the case among men. Slaves beg pardon of their offended masters by kissing their feet, and the poor kiss their benefactor's hand when they receive an alms.

III. 4. This poses a problem for you? God is spirit,⁹ his simple substance cannot be considered to have bodily members, so then, you say, show us what you mean by the hands and feet of God; explain to us the kiss of these hands and feet. But if I in turn put a question to my critic about the mouth of God—for, after all, Scripture does speak of the kiss of the mouth—will he tell me that this of course does refer to God? Surely if we attribute a mouth to God we may also attribute hands and feet, for, if he lacks these latter he must lack the former too.

But God has a mouth by which “he teaches men knowledge,”¹⁰ he has a hand with which “he provides for all living creatures,”¹¹ and he has feet for which the earth is a footstool.¹² When the sinners of the earth are converted from their ways, it is in abasement before these feet that they make satisfaction. I allow of course that God does not have these members by his nature, they represent certain modes of our encounter with him. The heartfelt desire to admit one's guilt brings a man down in lowliness before God, as it were to his feet; the heartfelt devotion of a worshiper finds in God renewal and refreshment, the touch, as it were, of his hand; and the delights of contemplation lead on to that ecstatic repose that is the fruit of the kiss of his mouth. Because his providence rules over all, he is all things to all, yet, to speak with accuracy, he is in no way what these things are. If we consider him in himself, his home is in inaccessible light,¹³ his peace is so much greater than we can understand,¹⁴ his wisdom has no bounds.¹⁵ No one can measure his greatness,¹⁶ no man can see him and live.¹⁷ Yet he who by his very

7. Jn 7:18.

10. Ps 93:10.

13. 1 Tim 6:16.

16. Ps 144:3.

8. Jn 9:24.

11. Ps 135:25.

14. Phil 4:7.

17. Ex 33:20.

9. Jn 4:24.

12. Is 66:1.

15. Ps 146:5.

nature is the principle through whom all creatures spring into being, cannot be far from any of us,¹⁸ since without him all are nothing.¹⁹ More wonderful still, though no one can be more intimately present to us than he, no one is more incomprehensible. For what is more intimate to anything than its own being? And yet, what is more incomprehensible to any of us than the being of all things? Of course when I say that God is the being of all things, I do not wish it to be understood in the sense that he and they are identical, but rather in the sense of the words of Scripture: "All that exists comes from him, all is by him and in him."²⁰ He is the creator, the efficient cause, not the material, of every creature. Such is the way the God whose majesty is so great has decided to be present to his creatures: as the being of all things that are, as the life of all things that live; a light to all those who think, virtue to all who think rightly, and glory to those who prevail in life's battle.

5. In this work of creation, of government, of administration, of imparting motion, of steering toward particular ends, of renewal and strengthening, he has no need of bodily instruments. By his word alone he had made all things, both corporeal and spiritual. Souls have a need for bodies, and bodies in turn a need for senses, if they are to know and influence each other. Not so the omnipotent God, who by the immediate act of his will, and that alone, both creates and governs at his good pleasure. His influence touches whom he wills, as much as he wills, without calling on the aid or service of bodily powers. What possible help could he receive from bodily senses when he decides to take cognizance of the things he brought into being? Nothing has the remotest chance of hiding from him, or of escaping that light of his that penetrates everywhere; sense awareness can never be the medium of his knowledge. Not merely does he know all things without a body's intervention, he also makes himself known to the pure in heart²¹ without the need for recourse to it. I have spoken extensively on this point in order to make it more plain for you, but now pressure of time demands that I come to an end, so we must postpone further discussion till tomorrow.

18. Acts 17:27.

19. Jn 1:3.

20. Rom 11:36.

21. Mt 5:8.

SERMON 5

ON THE FOUR KINDS OF SPIRITS

AS YOU KNOW, SPIRITS CAN BE DIVIDED into classes: that of the animal, that of man, that of the angel, and that of God who created all the others. Each of these, with one exception, needs a body or a body's likeness, either for its own sake or for the sake of others or for both. The exception is he whom every creature, whether corporeal or spiritual, is called on to acknowledge in sentiments like the Psalmist: "You are my God because you have no need of my goods."¹ If we consider the animal we see that its spirit, its life principle, cannot even exist without a body. When the animal dies its soul ceases to live at the same moment that it ceases to impart life. We indeed continue to live after the body's death, but only by means of the body do we gain those merits that lead to a life of blessedness. St Paul sensed this, saying: "The invisible things of God are understood through the things he has made."² All creatures that he has made, creatures that possess a body and are therefore visible, can be understood by our minds only through the body's instrumentality. Therefore our souls have need of a body. Without it we cannot attain to that form of knowledge by which alone we are elevated toward the contemplation of truths essential to happiness. If one of you will object that baptized infants who die before acquiring a knowledge of the

1. Ps 15:2. See JB, Ps 16, note b, p. 797. The modern translations, JB, RSV, etc, do not correspond to the Vulgate as quoted by St Bernard. The Hebrew original is vague.

2. Rom 1:20.

material creation are believed nevertheless to enter heaven, I shall reply briefly that this is a gift of grace, not a reward of merit. For the moment this discussion deals with normal processes, not with the special interventions of God.

2. Let us now study the case of heavenly spirits. We can be absolutely sure that these have a need of bodies from those divinely inspired words: "Are they not all spirits whose work is service, sent to help those who will be the heirs of salvation?"³ How will it be possible for them to fulfill this service without a body, especially among beings who possess bodies? Is it not true that only creatures with bodies can run to and fro and pass from place to place? Do we not know on unimpeachable authority⁴ that angels have frequently acted that way? You recall how they were seen by the patriarchs of old, how they entered their tents, shared their meal, and had their feet washed. And so we see that though both animal and angelic spirits have need of bodies, it is not for their own sakes but in order to render some service to others.

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

3. Heb 1:14.

4. Cf. Gen 19:1; 32:1; Ex 14:19; Mt 4:11; 13:49; etc. The common opinion in St Bernard's time was that immaterial beings were incapable of locomotion without bodies. It was based on the teaching of no less a master than Aristotle. The vagueness of the teaching of the Fathers on this point was due to the lack of a clear philosophical distinction at that period, between body and spirit. In 1215, sixty-two years after St Bernard's death, the Fourth Lateran Council defined both the existence and the spirituality of the angels.

that he may give us the service appropriate to his nature, the second that he may lovingly support us. What benefit they themselves may derive from a body I cannot see, at least with regard to eternal life. The spirit of the animal can indeed perceive corporeal things by means of the body, but is this body of such potential value to him that the material world which he experiences through the senses enables him to advance to a knowledge of spiritual and intellectual truths? Surely not. On the other hand, within the limits of its corporeal and temporal service, the body does provide a gateway to a knowledge of these truths for those who transmute their usage of the things of time into coin of eternal reward, "dealing with this world as though they had no dealing with it."⁵

4. We must understand too that if the angel can soar to a grasp of the highest truths and penetrate their profoundest depths, he does so by the vital force and kinship of his nature rather than with the aid of a body, or with the awareness of things that bodily senses provide. St Paul implied this when he said: "The invisible things of God are understood through the things he has made," adding the qualification, "by the creature of the world."⁶ Because this is not so for the creature of heaven. For, what the spirit clothed in flesh and dwelling on the earth strives to achieve gradually and little by little, through the knowledge it derives from the senses, that same the dweller of the heavens attains with all speed and ease, because of the native fineness and sublime quality of its being. No prop of bodily sense sustains its poise, no bodily member ministers aid to its effort, no bodily medicine whatsoever contributes to its vision. Why should they search for spiritual meanings among bodily substances when they can find them in the book of life⁷ without any discordance, and understand them without any hardship. Why should a man work his sweat out winnowing grain from the chaff,

5. 1 Cor 7:31.

6. Rom 1:20. *A creatura mundi* needs to be translated in St Bernard's context as "by the creature of the world." Both the Greek and Vulgate renderings are ambiguous. The Greek is probably best translated: "since world-creation."

7. Phil 4:3.

pressing wine from grapes and oil from olives, if he has an abundance of all these things ready to hand? Who will beg his food from door to door when his own house is stocked with bread?⁸ Will he bother to dig a well, to explore with might and main for springs of water in the bowels of the earth, for whom a burbling fountain pours out full-flowing, limpid streams? Neither angelic nor brute spirit therefore can benefit from corporeal aids in acquiring the knowledge that makes a spiritual being happy. The brute's natural stupidity renders him incapable of that knowledge, while the angel, by a prerogative of splendor and excellence, has no need of a bodily intermediary.

5. We come now to the spirit of man. This, since it holds a middle place between the extremes of bestial and angelic spirits, manifestly has a twofold need of a body: without it the soul can act neither for its own advantage nor for the benefit of others. For, to say nothing of the other members of the body or of the duties they perform, how, I ask, can you instruct the listener if you have no tongue, or receive instruction if you have no ear?

6. Therefore, since without the support of the body the brute spirit cannot offer the service it owes, nor the heavenly spirit fulfill its labor of love, nor the rational spirit of man succeed in providing for its own and its neighbor's salvation, it follows that every created spirit certainly has a need of bodily faculties, whether it be merely to assist others, or, as in the case of man, to assist as well as being assisted. What then if there be some living things whose existence seems to confer no benefit on themselves, nor to minister in any obvious way to the needs of humanity? Well, are they not good to look at, if not to use? They are for the mind's study rather than the body's utility, there their advantage lies. Even if injurious, and an obstacle to human welfare in this world, their bodies still serve a purpose for all those whom he had called according to his purpose to be saints.⁹ If these creatures do not provide food or perform a service, they certainly make man use his wits in accord with that progress in understanding common to all who enjoy the

8. Lk 15:17.

9. Rom 8:28.

use of reason, by which the mysteries of God may be apprehended and contemplated through the things he has made.¹⁰ For both the devil and his satellites, whose intentions are always evil, are ever bent on hurting those who do what is right. To these latter St Peter said: "Who can hurt you if you are determined to do only what is right?"¹¹ God forbid that they should be able to harm you. The truth rather is that in spite of themselves they benefit the good.

II. 7. As for the rest, whether the bodies of angels be natural to them as bodies are to men; whether, immortal though they be, their bodies have an animal nature like man's, which in this life is not immortal; whether they change these bodies and turn them into whatever form and figure suits them when they wish to become visible, imparting to them the density and solidity that fits their purpose, while at the same time, in the reality of their own nature with its essential subtlety, they remain impalpable to us and beyond our power of vision; or whether again, while continuing to exist as simple spiritual substances, they merely assume bodies when they find a need for them, and then, once the need has passed, allow them to dissolve again into the elements from which they were formed—all these are questions which I prefer that you should not ask me. The Fathers seem to have held divergent views on the problem,¹² and I must confess that I cannot come to a decision about the view I might be justified in teaching. But I am of the opinion that knowledge of these matters would not contribute greatly to your spiritual progress.

8. Try to understand this however, that no created spirit can of itself act directly on our minds. This means that without the mediation of a bodily instrument it cannot make contact with or

10. Rom 1:20.

11. 1 Pet 3:13.

12. See note 4 above. For the present doctrine on angels one may consult Pius XII's *Humani Generis*, where it is pointed out that the constant Catholic doctrine was that they are personal beings. See *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill 1967) for a historic perspective of the doctrine up to the present day. A source list is also provided. G. Bareille in *Dict. de theol. Cathol.*, I (1903), col. 1195-1200, furnishes a detailed study of the opinions referred to by St Bernard.

infuse itself into our minds, so that thereby we either acquire knowledge or increase it, acquire virtue or improve on it. No angel, no created spirit has power to influence me in this way, nor can I influence them. Even the angels lack this power over each other.

III. That is a prerogative reserved to that supreme and infinite Spirit, who alone, when he imparts instruction to man or angel, does not require an ear to hear him nor a mouth to speak.¹³ He communicates himself directly to the mind, he makes himself known directly; a pure spirit himself, he is received by us in proportion to our rectitude. He alone has need of no one, he alone, by reason of his omnipotent will, is sufficient for himself and for all.

9. Nevertheless, there are boundless and countless achievements that he carries through by means of his subject creatures, whether corporeal or spiritual, but he uses them as master rather than as suppliant. For example, he now employs my tongue for his purpose of instructing you, when he could certainly impart the same knowledge directly with greater facility on his part and more pleasure for you. This mode of acting that he has chosen represents an indulgence on his part, not indigence. He makes this promotion of your welfare an occasion of merit for me; it does not mean that he needs my assistance. This is a truth that every man should remember when he does good deeds, lest he give glory to himself and not to the Lord for the fruits of grace.¹⁴ There is furthermore the case of the person, be he bad angel or bad man, who performs good deeds against his will. It is plain that the good of which he is the agent does not benefit himself, since no good can benefit one whose will is set against it. He is therefore merely a dispenser of good, but, I know not why, we seem to feel that the good which comes to us through an evil agent is on that account more gratifying and pleasurable. This is the reason why God makes use of the wicked to benefit the just; it by no means implies that he needs their help in doing good.

10. And who will doubt that God has less need still of those

13. Ps 93:10.

14. 1 Cor 1:31.

creatures that lack sense or reason? But when these do have a share in the doing of good we are reminded that all creatures are the servants of that God¹⁵ who can so rightly say: "The world is mine."¹⁶ Again, because he knows the means that best suit his purpose, he does not choose a bodily creature for the sake of the efficacy of its action but rather for the fittingness of it. Granted then that bodily agents are often and opportunely used in promoting the works of God, for example, the showers that quicken the seeds, that multiply the crops and ripen the fruit, what need has he, I ask, for a body of his own when to his least desire all bodies, both in heaven and on earth, are equally obedient? A body of his own would be superfluous to one for whom none exists outside his sway. But if I were to include in this present sermon all the points that might be dealt with on this subject, it would be unreasonably prolonged, and I should perhaps overtax the endurance of some. We shall find another occasion to discuss them.

15. Ps 118:91.

16. Ps 49:12.

SERMON 6

GOD'S INFINITE POWER, MERCY AND JUDGMENT

IN ORDER TO CONNECT THIS TALK with my last, let me recall to your minds what I then said. The supreme and Infinite Spirit, and he alone, has no need of a bodily faculty or of any bodily assistance, in the accomplishment of all that he wishes to do or permit. We may with perfect confidence then, assert that God is truly an immaterial being, just as he is truly immortal.¹ He alone in the world of spirits so far transcends the efficacy of all corporeal beings, that not only is he entirely independent of bodily aid in all the works that he undertakes, but by a simple gesture of his will he is able to achieve his purpose when and as he pleases. His is the sole sovereign power, therefore, that neither for intrinsic nor extrinsic reasons requires the support of a bodily form. His omnipotent will finds response that is instant and effectual. All that is lofty bends to it, all that is stubborn yields, every creature pays it court. It needs no other power, bodily or spiritual, to intervene on its behalf. He needs no tongue to teach or advise, no hand to help or uphold, no feet to run to the rescue when danger looms.

2. Our ancestors down through the ages experienced these ways of God repeatedly; his gifts pursued them without fail, but the benefactor's hand was hidden. He indeed deployed his strength from one end of the earth to the other, yet ordering all things with gentleness,² but men remained insensitive to him. They enjoyed the largess the Lord poured out, but they failed to recognize him as the

1. 1 Tim 6:16.

2. Wis 8:1.

Lord of hosts, deceived by the tranquillity that shrouded his dealings with men.³ Though they owed him their being they did not live in his presence. They lived through him, but not for him. What understanding they possessed was from him, but him they failed to understand. They were alienated, ungrateful, irrational. Their being, their life, their reason, all these they ascribed to nature, or, more foolishly still, to chance. Many again arrogantly assumed that the workings of God's providence were the fruit of their own labor and strength. What wonders have not deceitful spirits attributed to their own powers, what wonders are attributed to the sun and moon, to the forces of earth and water, even to the handicrafts of mere mortals! Herbs, trees and the smallest and commonest of seeds were honored as gods.

3. How sad indeed that men should degrade and exchange the one who was their glory for the image of a grass-eating ox.⁴ But God had mercy on their errors: coming forth from his shady and thickly covered mountain,⁵ he pitched his tent in the sun.⁶ He became incarnate for the sake of carnal men, that he might induce them to relish the life of the Spirit. In the body and through the body he performed works of which not man but God was the author. He showed by his commands that chance events were subject to his law. He revealed the foolishness of human wisdom,⁷ and overthrew the tyranny of evil spirits, thereby manifestly showing that when these things were done in past ages they were done by him. In the body, I repeat, and through the body, he performed wonderful deeds with an authority that was obvious. He proclaimed the message of salvation and endured outrage, thus clearly demonstrating that he it was whose invisible power created the world, whose wisdom governed it, and whose benevolence protected it. And finally, by preaching the good news to thankless crowds, by proving himself with signs to men without faith⁸ and

3. Wis 12:18.

4. Ps 105:20.

5. Hab 3:3. This text of St Bernard is not in the Vulgate or any of the modern versions. It is an old version found in the first of the Good Friday tracts.

6. Ps 18:6.

7. 1 Cor 1:20.

8. 1 Cor 14:22.

praying for those who crucified him, did he not plainly declare himself to be that same person who, in union with the Father, daily causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike?⁹ For this is what he himself said: "If I am not doing my Father's work, there is no need to believe me."¹⁰

4. See him then, instructing the disciples on the mountain by word of mouth¹¹ at the same time that he enlightens heaven's angels in silence. See how at the touch of a fleshly hand a leper is healed,¹² blindness is dispelled,¹³ the deaf are empowered to hear, the dumb to speak,¹⁴ the sinking disciple is rescued on the lake,¹⁵ and you will surely recognize him as the one to whom David long ago uttered the words: "You open your hand, you satisfy the desire of every living thing;"¹⁶ and again: "When you open your hand all are filled with your goodness."¹⁷ See how, prostrate at his human feet, the penitent finds assurance as she is told: "Your sins are forgiven."¹⁸ She knows that he is the one of whom she had read in words composed long ago: "The devil shall go forth before his feet."¹⁹ For when sin is forgiven it is certain that the devil is driven out from the sinner's heart, and for this reason Christ embraced all sinners in his statement: "Now sentence is being passed on this world, now the prince of this world is overthrown."²⁰ God removes the sin of the one who makes humble confession, and thereby the devil loses the sovereignty he had gained over the human heart.

5. Again you find him with those feet of flesh walking on the waters,²¹ him of whom the Psalmist long before the incarnation said: "You strode across the sea, you marched across the ocean,"²² by which he meant: you tread under foot the puffed-up hearts of the proud, you repress the surging passions of sensual men; the wicked are won over to goodness, the haughty to lowliness. And because God acts invisibly in accomplishing this, the sensual man

9. Mt 5:45.

12. Mt 8:3.

15. Mt 14:31.

18. Lk 7:48.

21. Mt 14:25.

10. Jn 10:37.

13. Mt 9:29-30.

16. Ps 144:16.

19. Hab 3:5.

22. Ps 76:20.

11. Mt 5:2.

14. Mk 7:33-35.

17. Ps 103:28.

20. Jn 12:31.

fails to perceive the doer. So the Psalmist adds: “. . . but your steps could not be seen.”²³ In connection with this we may understand the Father’s words to his Son: “Sit at my right hand and I will make your enemies a footstool for you,”²⁴ that is, I shall subjugate to your will all those who spurn you, either against their will, and then they will be miserable, or with that willingness which will make them blessed. Because carnal men did not perceive this work of the Spirit—“the animal man does not perceive anything of the Spirit of God”²⁵—it was necessary that the sinner should receive pardon for her sins while lying prone at God’s feet of flesh, kissing these same feet with her lips of flesh. In this way that change of the right hand of the Most High,²⁶ by which in a wonderful but invisible manner he leads the wicked to repentance,²⁷ is made manifest to those in bondage to the senses.

II. 6. However, I must not omit to speak of those spiritual feet of God to which the penitent’s first kiss, understood in a spiritual sense, ought to be directed. Well do I know the inquisitive bent of your minds, that allows nothing whatever to pass without scrutiny. Nor must we disdain to consider what are those feet by which Scripture so frequently draws our attention to God. At one time he is described as standing: “We will adore in the place where his feet stood;”²⁸ at another time as walking: “I will dwell in the midst of them and I will walk among them;”²⁹ and again as running: “He exulted like a hero to run his race.”³⁰ If it seemed right to St Paul to describe Christ’s head in terms of the divinity,³¹ it should not seem unreasonable to us to ascribe the feet to his humanity. Let us call one of these feet mercy, the other judgment. You are familiar with these two words, they both occur together, as you remember, in several passages of Scripture. That God assumed the foot of mercy in the flesh to which he united himself, is taught in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which speaks of Christ as one who has been tempted in

23. Ps 76:20.

24. Ps 109:1.

25. 1 Cor 2:14.

26. Ps 76:11.

27. Rom 4:5.

28. Ps 131:7.

29. Ex 25:8; Lv 26:12. Cf. 2 Cor 6:16.

30. Ps 18:6.

31. 1 Cor 11:3.

every way that we are, though he is without sin, that he might become merciful.³² And the other foot that is called judgment? Does not God made man plainly point out that this also belongs to the assumed humanity where he declares: "Because he is the Son of Man the Father has appointed him supreme judge."³³

7. With these two feet, therefore, so aptly united and controlled by the divine head, he who was the invisible Emmanuel is born of a woman, born a subject of the Law,³⁴ appears on earth and moves among men.³⁵ It is on these feet that, in a spiritual, invisible manner, he still goes about doing good and curing all who have fallen into the power of the devil.³⁶ With these very feet he finds his way into the souls of his lovers, tirelessly enlightening and searching the hearts and loins of the faithful.³⁷ See if these are not those legs of the Bridegroom, which the bride so magnificently praises in subsequent verses, comparing them, if I mistake not, to "alabaster columns set in sockets of pure gold"³⁸ How beautiful this is, because in very truth, in the incarnate wisdom of God, signified by the gold, mercy and truth have met each other.³⁹ Therefore all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth.⁴⁰

III. 8. Happy is the man then in whose soul the Lord Jesus once sets these feet of his. There are two signs by which you may recognize such a one, for he cannot but bear upon him the imprint of these divine footsteps. These signs are fear and hope, the former presenting the imprint of judgment, the latter that of mercy. Truly, the Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, and in them that hope in his mercy,⁴¹ for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,⁴² hope the growth of wisdom. Its perfection charity reserves to itself. If all this be true, then obviously this first kiss, given to the feet, brings forth no small fruit. But of one thing you must beware, that you do not neglect either of these feet. If, for instance, you feel deep sorrow for your sins along with the fear of the judgment, you have

32. Heb 4:15.

35. Bar 3:38.

38. Song 5:15.

41. Ps 146:11.

33. Jn 5:27.

36. Acts 10:38.

39. Ps 84:11.

42. Prov 1:7.

34. Gal 4:4.

37. Rev 2:23.

40. Ps 24:10.

pressed your lips on the imprint of truth and of judgment. But if you temper that fear and sorrow with the thought of God's goodness and the hope of obtaining his pardon, you will realize that you have also embraced the foot of his mercy. It is clearly inexpedient to kiss one without the other; a man who thinks only of the judgment will fall into the pit of despair, another who deceitfully flatters God's mercy gives birth to a pernicious security.

9. I myself, however wretched I may be, have been occasionally privileged to sit at the feet of the Lord Jesus,⁴³ and to the extent that his merciful love allowed, have embraced with all my heart, now one, now the other, of these feet. And if, as happened at times, I should grow forgetful of his mercy, and with a stricken conscience become too deeply involved in the thought of the judgment, sooner or later I was cast down in unbelievable fear and shameful misery, enveloped in a frightful gloom out of which I cried in dismay: "Who has yet felt the full force of your fury, or learnt to fear the violence of your rage?"⁴⁴ But if on escaping from this I should cling more than was becoming to the foot of mercy, the opposite happened. I became dissipated, indifferent, negligent; lukewarm at prayer, languid at work, always on the watch for a laugh, inclined to say the wrong thing. And my interior was no steadier than my behavior. But you know what a teacher experience is; no longer of judgment alone or mercy alone, but of mercy and judgment I will sing to you, O Lord.⁴⁵ I shall never forget your precepts,⁴⁶ mercy and judgment will be the theme of my songs in the house of my pilgrimage,⁴⁷ until one day when mercy triumphs over judgment,⁴⁸ my wretchedness will cease to smart, and my heart, silent no longer, will sing to you.⁴⁹ It will be the end of sorrow.

43. Lk 10:39

46. Ps 118:93.

49. Ps 29:13.

44. Ps 89:11-12.

47. Ps 118:54.

45. Ps 100:1.

48. Jas 2:13.

SERMON 7

INTIMACIES OF THE LOVE OF GOD: THEIR EXPRESSION IN PRAYER AND IN THE PSALMS

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

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

2. “Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth,”¹ she said. Now who is this “she”? The bride. But why bride? Because she is the soul thirsting for God. In order to clarify for you the characteristics of the bride, I shall deal briefly with the diverse affective relationships between persons. Fear motivates a slave’s attitude to his master, gain that of wage-earner to his employer, the learner is attentive to his teacher, the son is respectful to his father. But the

1. Song 1:1.

one who asks for a kiss, she is a lover. Among all the natural endowments of man love holds first place, especially when it is directed to God, who is the source whence it comes. No sweeter names can be found to embody that sweet interflow of affections between the Word and the soul, than bridegroom and bride. Between these all things are equally shared, there are no selfish reservations, nothing that causes division. They share the same inheritance, the same table, the same home, the same marriage-bed, they are flesh of each other's flesh. "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body."² The bride for her part is bidden to "forget her nation and her ancestral home," so that the bridegroom may fall in love with her beauty.³ Therefore if a love relationship is the special and outstanding characteristic of the bride and groom, it is not unfitting to call the soul that loves God a bride. Now one who asks for a kiss is in love. It is not for liberty that she asks, nor for an award, not for an inheritance nor even knowledge, but for a kiss. It is obviously the request of a bride who is chaste, who breathes forth a love that is holy, a love whose ardor she cannot entirely disguise. For note how abruptly she bursts into speech. About to ask a great favor from a great personage, she does not resort, as others do, to the arts of seduction, she makes no devious or fawning solicitations for the prize that she covets. There is no preamble, no attempt to conciliate favor. No, but with a spontaneous outburst from the abundance of her heart,⁴ direct even to the point of boldness, she says: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth."

3. Does not this seem to you to indicate that she wished to say: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides you."⁵

III. Her love is surely chaste when it seeks the person whom she loves, and not some other thing of his. It is a holy love, the impulse of an upright spirit rather than of carnal desire. And it is an ardent

2. Gen 2:24.

3. Ps 44:11.

4. Mt 12:34.

5. Ps 72:25.

love, blinded by its own excess to the majesty of the beloved. For what are the facts? He is the one at whose glance the earth trembles,⁶ and does she demand that he give her a kiss? Can she be possibly drunk? Absolutely drunk! And the reason? It seems most probable that when she uttered those passionate words she had just come out from the cellar of wine;⁷ afterwards she boasts of having been there. David in his turn cried out to God concerning people such as the bride: "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of your house; and you will make them drink of the torrent of your pleasure."⁸ How great this power of love: what great confidence and freedom of spirit! What is more manifest than that fear is driven out by perfect love!⁹

4. There is a certain modesty in the fact that she directs that utterance of hers not to the Bridegroom himself but to others, as if he were absent: "Let him kiss me," she exclaimed, "with the kiss of his mouth." A sublime favor is petitioned, and hence there is need that the petitioner should be commended by a becoming modesty in the manner of the request. One who seeks access to the interior of the home goes round to the intimate friends or members of the household to attain what he desires. In this present instance who might these people be? In my opinion they are the holy angels who wait on us as we pray, who offer to God the petitions and desires of men, at least of those men whose prayer they recognize to be sincere, free from anger and dissension. We find proof of this in the words of the angel to Tobias: "When you prayed with tears and buried the dead, and left your dinner and hid the dead by day in your house, and buried them by night, I offered your prayer to the Lord."¹⁰ I feel that you are fully persuaded of this from many other testimonies of Scripture. That the holy angels do condescend to mingle with us when we praise God in psalmody is very clearly stated by the Psalmist: "The princes went before, joined with the singers, in the midst of young damsels playing on timbrels."¹¹ He also said: "I will sing praise to you in the sight of the angels."¹²

6. Ps 103:32.

7. Song 1:3; 2:4.

8. Ps 35:9.

9. 1 Jn 4:18.

10. Tob 12:12.

11. Ps 67:26.

12. Ps 137:1.

IV. For this reason it makes me sad to see some of you deep in the throes of sleep during the night office, to see that instead of showing reverence for those princely citizens of heaven you appear like corpses. When you are fervent they respond with eagerness and are filled with delight in participating in your solemn offices. What I fear is that one day, repelled by our sloth, they will angrily depart. Too late then shall we remorsefully cry out to God: "You have turned my friends away from me and made me repulsive to them;"¹³ or again: "You have turned my friends and neighbors from me, my acquaintances from my misery;"¹⁴ or yet again: "They that were near me stood afar off, and they that sought my soul used violence."¹⁵ It is certain indeed that if the good spirits withdraw from us, we shall not easily withstand the obsessions of the evil ones. And so I must warn the slothful: "Cursed be he who does the work of God half-heartedly."¹⁶ It is not I but the Lord who says: "Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, I will spew you out of my mouth."¹⁷ Be mindful then of these angelic princes when you go to pray or to sing the psalms; stand with disciplined reverence and be proud that your angels continuously see the face of the Father.¹⁸ Since they are all spirits whose work is service, sent to help those who will be the heirs of salvation,¹⁹ they bear our prayers to God in heaven and return laden with graces for us. Let us make use of the service of those in whose company our lot is cast, that by the mouths of children and babes in arms praise may be made perfect.²⁰ Let us invite them: "Sing praises to God, sing praises!" And let us hear them in turn responding: "Sing praises to our king, sing praises!"²¹

5. Joined therefore as you are in songs of praise with heaven's own singers, since you too are citizens like all the saints, and part of God's household,²² sing wisely.²³ As food is sweet to the palate, so does a psalm delight the heart. But the soul that is sincere and wise

13. Ps 87:9.

16. Jer 48:10.

19. Heb 1:14.

22. Eph 2:19.

14. Ps 87:19.

17. Rev 3:15f.

20. Ps 8:3.

23. Ps 46:8.

15. Ps 37:12f.

18. Mt 18:10.

21. Ps 46:7.

will not fail to chew the psalm with the teeth as it were of the mind, because if he swallows it in a lump, without proper mastication, the palate will be cheated of the delicious flavor, sweeter even than honey that drips from the comb.²⁴ Let us with the Apostles offer a honey-comb at the table of the Lord in the heavenly banquet.²⁵ As honey flows from the comb so should devotion flow from the words; otherwise if one attempts to assimilate them without the condiment of the Spirit "the written letters bring death."²⁶ But if like St Paul you sing praises not only with the spirit but with the mind as well,²⁷ you too will experience the truth of Jesus' statement: "The words I have spoken to you are spirit, and they are life;"²⁸ the truth too of the words of Wisdom: "My spirit is sweet above honey."²⁹

6. Doing this your soul shall be delighted in fatness,³⁰ you will find your holocaust acceptable;³¹ you will conciliate the king, give pleasure to his princes and win the favor of the whole assembly above. And when they smell this sweet fragrance³² in the heavens, they will surely say of you too: "What is this coming up from the desert like a column of smoke, breathing of myrrh and frankincense and every perfume the merchant knows?"³³

V. "The princes of Judah," the Psalmist exclaimed, "are their leaders, the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali;"³⁴ the angelic princes are the leaders of those whose work is the praise of God, who live lives of continence, lives of contemplation. Our angelic princes know how pleasing to their King are the praises of psalmody, the fortitude of chaste souls, the singleness of purpose of contemplatives; and they are eager to discover in us these and other first-fruits of the Spirit, which are none other than the first and purest fruits of wisdom. You are not unaware that in Hebrew the word Judah means one who praises or makes acknowledgment, the

24. Ps 118:111.

27. 1 Cor 14:15.

30. Is 55:2.

33. Song 3:6.

25. Lk 24:42.

28. Jn 6:64.

31. Ps 19:4.

34. Ps 67:28.

26. 2 Cor 3:6.

29. Sir 24:27.

32. Phil 4:18.

word Zebulun, a fortified dwelling, and Naphtali, a swift hind,³⁵ whose powers of agile leaping signify the ecstatic ardors of the contemplative mind. As the hind penetrates the wood's dark avenues, so does the contemplative spirit penetrate the obscure meanings of things. And finally we have God's own words: "Whoever offers praise, his sacrifice honors me."³⁶

7. Now if praise is unseemly in a sinner's mouth,³⁷ do you not see how entirely necessary is the virtue of continence, if you are not to let sin reign in your mortal bodies?³⁸ Nevertheless, continence will gain you no credit before God if you flaunt it for the praises of men. Consequently there is the greatest need too for that uprightness of intention by which you will both strive to please God alone and find the strength to adhere to him. This adherence to God is nothing less than that vision of God granted as a unique favor only to the pure in heart.³⁹ That David had this clean heart⁴⁰ is evident from his words: "My soul clings close to you";⁴¹ and again: "My joy lies in being close to God."⁴² His vision of God brought him close to God, his closeness assured the vision. The man who lives in this state habitually will have the angels for his frequent and familiar guests, especially if they frequently find him in prayer. How I desire, O benign princes, that through you my requests may be made known to God!⁴³ I do not refer here to God's normal knowledge, for the very thought of man is known to him,⁴⁴ but rather that they be apprehended in the actual presence of God, by those who abide with God, both the holy angels and the glorified souls of men. Who will raise me up, in my poverty, from the dust, in my indigence from the dunghill, that I may share a place with the princes⁴⁵ and be assigned a seat of honor?⁴⁶ I am convinced that they will welcome with joy into their mansions him whom it pleased them to visit on the dunghill. Is it possible that we should

35. Gen 49:21. See St Jerome's work on the interpretation of Hebrew names, ed. P. de Lagarde (1827) n. 61, p. 94:27-28; and n. 11, p. 39:26. Also, J. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (London: Chapman, 1965).

36. Ps 49:23.

37. Sir 15:9.

38. Rom 6:12.

39. Mt 5:8.

40. Ps 50:12.

41. Ps 62:9.

42. Ps 72:28.

43. Phil 4:6.

44. Ps 75:11.

45. Ps 112:7.

46. 1 Sam 2:8.

be snubbed in heaven by those whom our conversion here below made so happy?

VI. 8. I think, therefore, that it was to these, members of the household and her companions, that the bride addressed her request, to these she revealed her heart's desire when she said: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." See the familiar and friendly communication there is between the aspiring soul who is still in the flesh and those powerful heavenly spirits. Her desire is to be kissed, she asks for what she desires; but she doesn't call her lover by name, she is certain that they know him because he has been so often the subject of her conversation with them. Accordingly she does not say: "Let this one or that one kiss me;" but simply: "let him Kiss me." This was the way Mary Magdalen behaved; she did not mention the name of the person she sought when she spoke to the man whom she took to be the gardener: "Sir, if you have taken him away . . ." ⁴⁷ Who is this "him"? She names no name, she takes for granted that what her own heart could not forget, even for a moment, must be plain to all. And so the bride's words to the Bridegroom's companions imply that they know her secret, that her inward state is manifest to them, and no name passes her lips in that impulsive pleading about her beloved: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." Today I shall speak no more to you about this kiss, I shall detain you no longer, but tomorrow you will hear from me whatever your prayers may win from him whose anointing teaches about all things. ⁴⁸ For flesh and blood do not reveal such a secret, ⁴⁹ but only he who searches the depths of God, ⁵⁰ the Holy Spirit who, proceeding from the Father and the Son, ⁵¹ lives and reigns equally with them for ever. Amen.

47. Jn 20:15.

48. I Jn 2:27.

49. Mt 16:17.

50. I Cor 2:10.

51. Jn 15:26. "And the Son" is added as in the Creed.

SERMON 8

THE HOLY SPIRIT: THE KISS OF THE MOUTH

AS I PROMISED YESTERDAY, and as you well remember, today we are to speak of the supreme kiss, that of the mouth. You must listen with more than usual attention to a theme that is sweet to the spirit above all others, that is so rare an experience and more difficult to understand. I think I should begin by considering the higher truths, and it seems to me that a kiss past comprehension, beyond the experience of any mere creature, was designated by him who said: "No one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."¹ For the Father loves the Son whom he embraces with a love that is unique; he who is infinite embraces his equal, who is eternal, his co-eternal, the sole God, his only-begotten. But the Son's bond with him is not less affectionate, for it led him even to death, as he himself testifies: "That all might know that I love the Father, rise, let us go."² And he went forth, as we know, to his passion. Now, that mutual knowledge and love between him who begets and him who is begotten—what can it comprise if not a kiss that is utterly sweet, but utterly a mystery as well?

2. For my part I am convinced that no creature, not even an angel, is permitted to comprehend this secret of divine love, so holy and so august. Does not Paul proclaim from his own experience that this is a peace which passes all understanding, even that of the

1. Mt 11:27.

2. Jn 14:31.

angels?³ And hence the bride, although otherwise so audacious, does not dare to say: "Let him kiss me with his mouth," for she knows that this is the prerogative of the Father alone. What she does ask for is something less: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." Do you wish to see the newly-chosen bride receiving this unprecedented kiss, given not by the mouth but by the kiss of the mouth? Then look at Jesus in the presence of his Apostles: "He breathed on them," according to St John, "and he said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"⁴ That favor, given to the newly-chosen Church, was indeed a kiss. That? you say. That corporeal breathing? O no, but rather the invisible Spirit, who is so bestowed in that breath of the Lord that he is understood to proceed from him equally as from the Father,⁵ truly the kiss that is common both to him who kisses and to him who is kissed. Hence the bride is satisfied to receive the kiss of the Bridegroom, though she be not kissed with his mouth. For her it is no mean or contemptible thing to be kissed by the kiss, because it is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit. If, as is properly understood, the Father is he who kisses, the Son he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity.

II. 3. He it is then who inspires the daring spirit of the bride, he it is whom she trustingly petitions to come to her under the guise of a kiss. But this boldness in her request is justified by something that she knows. For when the Son said: "No one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son," he added: "and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."⁶ But the bride has no doubt that if he will reveal himself to anybody, it will be to her. Therefore, she dares to ask for this kiss, actually for that Spirit in whom both the Father and the Son will reveal themselves to her. For it is not possible that one of these could be known without the other. That is why Christ said: "To have seen me is to have seen the

3. Phil 4:7.

4. Jn 20:22.

5. Jn 15:26.

6. Mt 11:27.

Father;”⁷ and John in his turn: “No one who has the Father can deny the Son, and to acknowledge the Son is to have the Father as well.”⁸ From these declarations it is clearly evident that the Father cannot be known apart from the Son, nor the Son apart from the Father. Rightly therefore did Christ point out that one achieves supreme happiness not by knowing any one of them, but by knowing both, when he said: “Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”⁹ As a consequence, those who follow the Lamb are said to have his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads,¹⁰ which is to be glorified by this twofold knowledge.

4. But one of you may interpose and say: “Therefore knowledge of the Holy Spirit is not necessary, because when he said eternal life consisted of the knowledge of the Father and Son, he did not mention the Holy Spirit.” True enough; but where there is perfect knowledge of the Father and the Son, how can there be ignorance of the goodness of both, which is the Holy Spirit? For no man has a complete knowledge of another until he finds out whether his will be good or evil. So, although it has been said: “Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent,”¹¹ still, if that act of mission demonstrates the good-pleasure both of the Father lovingly sending his Son and of the Son freely obeying the Father, then the Holy Spirit is not passed over in complete silence, for he is implied in the mention of so immense a grace. The Holy Spirit indeed is nothing else but the love and the benign goodness of them both.

5. When the bride asks for the kiss therefore, she asks to be filled with the grace of this threefold knowledge, filled to the utmost capacity of mortal flesh. But it is the Son whom she approaches, since it is by him it is to be revealed, and to whom he wills.¹² He reveals himself therefore, and the Father as well, to whom it pleases him. And it is certain that he makes this revelation through the kiss, that is, through the Holy Spirit, a fact to which St Paul bears

7. Jn 14:9.

10. Rev 14:1-4.

8. 1 Jn 2:23.

11. Jn 17:3.

9. Jn 17:3.

12. Mt 11:27.

witness: "These are the very things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit."¹³ It is by giving the Spirit, through whom he reveals, that he shows us himself; he reveals in the gift, his gift is in the revealing. Furthermore, this revelation which is made through the Holy Spirit, not only conveys the light of knowledge but also lights the fire of love, as St Paul again testifies: "The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us."¹⁴

III. And that is perhaps the reason why, in the case of those who, knowing God, yet refused to honor him as God,¹⁵ we do not read that they knew by a revelation of the Holy Spirit; for even though they possessed knowledge they did not love. As St Paul states: "God has shown himself to them,"¹⁶ but he does not add: "through the Holy Spirit," lest those impious minds should usurp to themselves the kiss of the bride. They were content with the knowledge that gives self-importance, but ignorant of the love that makes the building grow.¹⁷ The apostle actually tells us the means by which they knew; they perceived him in the things that he had made.¹⁸ From all this it is clear that even their knowledge was not perfect, because they did not love. For if their knowledge had been complete, they would not have been blind to that goodness by which he willed to be born a human being, and to die for their sins. Just listen to what was revealed about God to them: "his everlasting power and deity,"¹⁹ says St Paul. As you see, they in their presumption of spirit—their own spirit, not God's—studied his attributes of sublimity and majesty. That he was gentle and humble in heart²⁰ they failed to understand. Nor must we be surprised at this, because we read of their leader, Behemoth, that he beholds everything that is high,²¹ nothing that is humble. On the contrary David did not walk among great things nor in wonders above

13. 1 Cor 2:10.

14. Rom 5:5.

15. Rom 1:21.

16. Rom 1:19.

17. 1 Cor 8:1.

18. Rom 1:20.

19. Rom 1:20.

20. Mt 11:29.

21. Job 41:25. In Job this quotation refers to Leviathan. Behemoth is described in 40:15ff. See JB, p. 775, note.

himself;²² he would not be a searcher of majesty lest he be overwhelmed by glory.²³

IV. 6. You too, if you would make prudent progress in your studies of the mysteries of the faith, would do well to remember the Wise Man's advice: "Do not try to understand things that are too difficult for you, or try to discover what is beyond your powers."²⁴ These are occasions when you must walk by the Spirit²⁵ and not according to your personal opinions, for the Spirit teaches not by sharpening curiosity but by inspiring charity. And hence the bride, when seeking him whom her heart loves,²⁶ quite properly does not put her trust in mere human prudence, nor yield to the inane conceits of human curiosity. She asks rather for a kiss, that is she calls upon the Holy Spirit by whom she is simultaneously awarded with the choice repast of knowledge and the seasoning of grace. How true it is that the knowledge imparted in the kiss is lovingly received, since the kiss is love's own token. But knowledge which leads to self-importance,²⁷ since it is devoid of love, cannot be the fruit of the kiss. Even those who have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge,²⁸ may not for any reason lay claim to that kiss. For the favor of the kiss bears with it a twofold gift, the light of knowledge and the fervor of devotion. He is in truth the Spirit of wisdom and insight,²⁹ who, like the bee carrying its burden of wax and honey, is fully equipped with the power both of kindling the light of knowledge and infusing the delicious nurture of grace. Two kinds of people therefore may not consider themselves to have been gifted with the kiss, those who know the truth without loving it, and those who love it without understanding it; from which we conclude that this kiss leaves room neither for ignorance nor for lukewarmness.

22. Ps 130:1.

23. Prov 25:27. This is the Vulgate—Douai version. Cf. JB, p. 969, note g; and RSV (Cath. ed.), p. 597, note u.

24. Sir 3:22.

25. Gal 5:16.

26. Song 3:1.

27. I Cor 8:1.

28. Rom 10:2.

29. Is 11:2.

V. So therefore, let the bride about to receive the twofold grace of this most holy kiss set her two lips in readiness, her reason for the gift of insight, her will for that of wisdom, so that overflowing with joy in the fullness of this kiss, she may be privileged to hear the words: "Your lips are moist with grace, for God has blessed you forever."³⁰

VI. Thus the Father, when he kisses the Son, pours into him the plenitude of the mysteries of his divine being, breathing forth love's deep delight, as symbolized in the words of the psalm: "Day to day pours forth speech."³¹ As has already been stated, no creature whatsoever has been privileged to comprehend the secret of this eternal, blessed and unique embrace; the Holy Spirit alone is the sole witness and confidant of their mutual knowledge and love. For who could ever know the mind of the Lord, or who could be his counsellor?³²

7. But I feel that one of you may now want to say: "What voice thundered forth to you a secret that, you insist, was made known to no creature?" Unhesitatingly I answer: "It is the only Son, who is in the Father's bosom who has made it known."³³ But he has made it known, I will say, not to the sorry and unworthy creature that I am, but to John, the Bridegroom's friend,³⁴ whose words these are; and not only to him but to John the Evangelist also, the disciple Jesus loved.³⁵ For his soul was pleasing to the Lord,³⁶ entirely worthy both of the name and the dowry of a bride, worthy of the Bridegroom's embraces, worthy that is, of leaning back on Jesus' breast.³⁷ John imbibed from the heart of the only-begotten Son what he in turn had imbibed from the Father. Nor is John the only one, it is true also of all to whom the Angel of the Great Counsel³⁸ said: "I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father."³⁹ Paul drank of it, because the Good News he preached is not a human message nor did he receive it through

30. Ps 44:3.

31. Ps 18:3.

32. Rom 11:34.

33. Jn 1:18.

34. Jn 3:29.

35. Jn 13:23.

36. Wis 4:14.

37. Jn 13:25.

38. Is 9:6. Vulg—Douai. Cf. JB and RSV.

39. Jn 15:15.

men, it is something he learned only through a revelation of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

VII. All of these indeed could say with felicity and truth: "It is the only Son who is in the Father's bosom who has made it known to us."⁴¹ And this revelation—what can you call it but a kiss? But it was the kiss of the kiss, not of the mouth. Listen if you will know what the kiss of the mouth is: "The Father and I are one;"⁴² and again: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me."⁴³ This is a kiss from mouth to mouth, beyond the claim of any creature. It is a kiss of love and of peace, but of the love which is beyond all knowledge,⁴⁴ and that peace which is so much greater than we can understand.⁴⁵ The truth is that the things that no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man,⁴⁶ were revealed to Paul by God through his Spirit, that is, through him who is the kiss of his mouth. That the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son⁴⁷ signifies the kiss of the mouth. But the kiss of the kiss we discover when we read: "Instead of the spirit of the world, we have received the Spirit that comes from God, to teach us to understand the gifts that he has given us."⁴⁸

8. But we must make a clearer distinction between the two. He who received the fullness is given the kiss of the mouth, but he who received from the fullness⁴⁹ is given the kiss of the kiss. Paul was certainly a great man, but no matter how high he should aim in making the offer of his mouth, even if he were to raise himself right into the third heaven,⁵⁰ he would still of necessity find himself remote from the lips of the Most High. He must abide content within the limits of his capacity, and since he cannot of himself reach that glorious countenance, let him humbly ask that it may lean down to him, that the kiss be transmitted from on high. He however who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁵¹ since he could dare to say: "The Father and I are one,"⁵² because he was joined to him as an equal and embraced him as an equal—he

40. Gal 1:11f.

41. Jn 1:18.

42. Jn 10:30.

43. Jn 14:10.

44. Eph 3:19.

45. Phil 4:7.

46. 1 Cor 2:9f.

47. Jn 14:10.

48. 1 Cor 2:12.

49. Jn 1:16.

50. 2 Cor 12:2.

51. Phil 2:6.

52. Jn 10:30.

does not beg for a kiss from an inferior position; rather on equally sublime heights mouth is joined to mouth, and by a prerogative that is unique he receives the kiss from the mouth. For Christ therefore, the kiss meant a totality, for Paul only a participation; Christ rejoiced in the kiss of the mouth, Paul only in that he was kissed by the kiss.

9. Felicitous, however, is this kiss of participation that enables us not only to know God but to love the Father, who is never fully known until he is perfectly loved. Are there not surely some among you who at certain times perceive deep within their hearts the Spirit of the Son exclaiming: "Abba, Father"?⁵³ Let that man who feels that he is moved by the same Spirit as the Son, let him know that he too is loved by the Father. Whoever he be let him be of good heart, let his confidence never waver.⁵⁴ Living in the Spirit of the Son, let such a soul recognize herself as a daughter of the Father, a bride or even a sister of the Son, for you will find that the soul who enjoys this privilege is called by either of these names. Nor will it cost me much to prove it, the proof is ready to hand. They are the names by which the Bridegroom addresses her: "I come into my garden, my sister, my bride."⁵⁵ She is his sister because they have the one Father; his bride because joined in the one Spirit. For if marriage according to the flesh constitutes two in one body,⁵⁶ why should not a spiritual union be even more efficacious in joining two in one spirit?⁵⁷ And hence anyone who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him.⁵⁸ But we have witness too from the Father, how lovingly and how courteously he gives her the name of daughter, and nevertheless invites her as his daughter-in-law to the sweet caresses of his Son: "Listen, daughter, pay careful attention: forget your nation and your ancestral home, then the king will fall in love with your beauty."⁵⁹ See then from whom this bride demands a kiss. O soul called to holiness, make sure that your attitude is respectful, for he is the Lord your God,⁶⁰ who perhaps ought not to be kissed, but rather adored with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

53. Gal 4:6.

54. Jas 1:6.

55. Song 5:1.

56. Gen 2:24.

57. 1 Cor 6:16.

58. 1 Cor 6:17.

59. Ps 44:11f.

60. Ps 94:6f.

SERMON 9

ON THE BREASTS OF THE BRIDE AND THE BRIDEGROOM

IT IS TIME NOW FOR US to return to the book and attempt an explanation of the words of the bride and their consequence. For there they are, swinging precipitately out of nowhere, suspended before us. But we must see if there is something antecedent to them to which we may suitably connect them up. Let us suppose therefore that those whom we have called the friends of the Bridegroom now again approach the bride as they did yesterday and the day before. They find her in a state of weariness, bemoaning her condition; and wondering what the cause may be they begin to question her: "What has happened? Why this unusual sadness?¹ Why do you murmur in this strange fashion? Is it not true that, estranged from your lawful husband, you turned aside with your lovers until,² after they had abused you shamefully, you were finally compelled to return to your first husband?³ Did you not entreat him with tears and endless petitions to be allowed at least to touch his feet?" "I remember," she said. "What then?" said they. "After receiving that favor, and even the pardon of your offences in the kissing of the feet,⁴ you became restless again. Instead of being satisfied with a mercy so wonderful, you became eager for greater familiarity; with renewed insistence you demanded and obtained the second grace, the kiss of the hand with its endowment of virtues both many and great." "I do not deny it," she replied. But they went on: "And are you not the one who so often swore

1. Gen 40:7.

2. Hos 2:5.

3. Hos 2:7.

4. Lk 7:38.

and protested that if you were ever favored with the kiss of the hand you would count that enough, you would ask for nothing further?" "Quite so," she said again. "So what is it then?" they continued. "Is it that you grieve because some of those gifts you received have been taken away again?" "No," she replied, "nothing of the kind." "Do you fear then that you will be condemned anew for the sins of your past life, that you presumed were forgiven?" "No," was her answer.

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

II. "I cannot rest," she said, "unless he kisses me with the kiss of his mouth.⁵ I thank him for the kiss of the feet, I thank him too for the kiss of the hand; but if he has genuine regard for me, let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. There is no question of ingratitude on my part, it is simply that I am in love. The favors I have received are far above what I deserve, but they are less than what I long for. It is desire that drives me on, not reason. Please do not accuse me of presumption if I yield to this impulse of love. My shame indeed rebukes me, but love is stronger than all. I am well aware that he is a king who loves justice;⁶ but headlong love does not wait for judgment, is not chastened by advice, not shackled by shame nor subdued by reason. I ask, I crave, I implore; let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. Don't you see that by his grace I have been for many years now careful to lead a chaste and sober life,⁷ I concentrate on spiritual studies, resist vices, pray often; I am watchful against temptations, I recount all my years in the bitterness of my soul.⁸ As far as I can judge I have lived among the brethren without quarrel.⁹ I have been submissive to authority,¹⁰ responding to the beck and call of my superior. I do not covet goods not mine; rather do I put both myself and my goods at the service of others. With sweat on my brow I eat my bread.¹¹ Yet in all these practices there is evidence only of my fidelity, nothing of enjoyment. What

5. Song 1:1.

8. Is 38:15.

11. Gen 3:19.

6. Ps 98:4.

9. Phil 3:6.

7. Tit 2:12.

10. Tit 3:1.

can I be but, in the words of the Prophet, another Ephraim, a well-trained heifer that loves to tread the threshing floor?¹² On top of that the Gospel says that he who does no more than his duty is looked on as a useless servant.¹³ I obey the commandments, to the best of my ability I hope, but in doing so 'my soul thirsts like a parched land.'¹⁴ If therefore he is to find my holocaust acceptable,¹⁵ let him kiss me, I entreat, with the kiss of his mouth."

3. Many of you too, as I recall, are accustomed to complain to me in our private conversations about a similar languor and dryness of soul, an ineptitude and dullness of mind devoid of the power to penetrate the profound and subtle truths of God; devoid too, entirely or for the most part, of the sweetness of the spirit. What of these, except that they yearn to be kissed? That they yearn is indeed evident, their very mouths are open to inhale the spirit of wisdom and insight:¹⁶ insight that they may attain to what they long for, wisdom in order to savor what the mind apprehends. I think that a motive such as this must have inspired the holy Prophet's prayer when he said: "My soul will feast most richly, on my lips a song of joy and in my mouth, praise."¹⁷ The kiss was surely what he sought for, that kiss at whose touch the lips are so bedewed with the richness of spiritual grace, that only the Prophet's words again, spoken in another context, can fathom the effect: "My mouth is full of your praises, that I might sing of your glory, of your splendor all day long."¹⁸ No sooner had he tasted than he burst forth: "Lord how great your goodness, reserved for those who fear you!"¹⁹ This kiss has sufficiently detained us now. And yet, if I am to speak the truth, I cannot feel assured that my exposition measures up to the dignity of the subject. But let us pass on to other themes, experience of the kiss tells more than any words.

III. 4. The text continues: "For your breasts are better than wine, smelling sweet of the best ointments."²⁰ The author does not say who spoke these words, so we are free to assign them to the person

12. Hos 10:11.

15. Ps 19:4.

18. Ps 70:8.

13. Lk 17:10.

16. Is 11:2.

19. Ps 30:20.

14. Ps 142:6.

17. Ps 62:6.

20. Song 1:1-2.

whom we think they best suit. For my part, I can see reasons for attributing them either to the bride, or to the Bridegroom or to the latter's companions. And for a start I shall point out how fittingly the bride might have spoken them. Let us say that while she and those companions are conversing together, the Bridegroom on whom the conversation centers, suddenly appears, for he loves to draw near to those who speak about him. It is his way. For example he proved himself a pleasant and affable companion to the two men who conversed together as they went to Emmaus.²¹ This is no more than what he has promised in the Gospel: "Where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them;"²² and through the Prophet: "Long before they call I shall answer;²³ before they stop speaking I shall say: 'I am here.'"²⁴ And so in the present instance he approaches though not actually invited; their words so please him that he anticipates their invitation. I am sure that sometimes he does not wait for words, our thoughts alone are enough to summon him. Did not a man after God's own heart say:²⁵ "The Lord has heard the desire of the poor: your ear has heard the preparation of their heart."²⁶ In every place you must be attentive to your inward state, you must realize that the God who is the assessor of mind and heart²⁷ knows everything about you; he it is who moulds every heart and takes thought of all men do.²⁸ The bride therefore, becoming conscious of the Bridegroom's presence, grew suddenly silent. She is ashamed to think that he is aware of her presumption, for a certain modesty had prompted her to use intermediaries in achieving her purpose. So in her endeavor to excuse her temerity, she turns to him and says: "For your breasts are better than wine, smelling sweet of the best ointments." What she meant was: "If I seem to be high-minded,²⁹ O my Bridegroom, you are responsible; you have honored me so greatly with the nurturing sweetness of your breasts, that by your love and not by my own temerity I have put aside all fear, and may seem to have been more daring than is proper. I do indeed make bold, but it is because I am convinced of

21. Lk 24:15.

24. Is 58:9.

27. Ps 7:10.

22. Mt 18:20.

25. Acts 13:22.

28. Ps 32:15.

23. Is 65:24.

26. Ps 9:38.

29. Rom 11:20.

your goodness, forgetful of your majesty." These explanations have been given merely to supply a context for the words of the bride.

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

IV. These two breasts are two proofs of his native kindness: his patience in awaiting the sinner and his welcoming mercy for the penitent. This twofold sweetness of inward joy overflows from the heart of the Lord Jesus in the form of tireless expectancy and prompt forgiveness. And be assured that this is no figment of mine. You yourselves have read of his patience: "Are you abusing his abundant goodness, patience and toleration, not realizing that this goodness of God is meant to lead you to repentance?"³⁰ To this very end he postpones his punishment of the contumacious, awaiting a favorable moment to bestow on them the grace of repentance and forgiveness. He does not wish the death of a wicked man, but that he turn back and live.³¹ And now let us see an example of the second breast, which I have called promptness to forgive. Of this you have read: "At whatever hour the sinner will repent, his sin will be forgiven him."³² Or again: "Let the wicked man abandon his way, the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn back to the Lord who will take pity on him, to our God who is rich in forgiving."³³ David beautifully described both breasts in the few words: "Slow to anger, most loving."³⁴ It is through her experience of this twofold goodness therefore, that the bride justifies the increase of confidence that emboldened her to ask for the kiss. She would seem to say to the Bridegroom: "What wonder if I presume to ask you for this favor, since your breasts have given me such overwhelming joy? It is your breasts' very sweetness, not trust in my own merits, that provokes me to this daring."

6. When she said, then, "Your breasts are better than wine," she meant: "The richness of the grace that flows from your breasts contributes far more to my spiritual progress than the biting

30. Rom 2:4.

31. Ezek 33:11.

32. This text is not found in the bible. Echoes of it may be found in several texts. Cf. Ezek 33:12, 15, 16, 19 and Is 30:15.

33. Is 55:7.

34. Ps 102:8.

reprimands of superiors. Not only are they better than wine, but smelling sweet of the best ointments too, for not merely do you refresh those present with the milk of inward sweetness, you also spray the pleasing perfume of good repute over the absent ones, and so are well thought of, both by outsiders and by those within.³⁵ You have, as I say, milk within and ointments without, for none would come to be refreshed with the milk, if you had not the perfume to attract them." We shall see later on³⁶ what these ointments contain that make them worth considering, when we discuss the text: "We will run after you to the odor of your ointments."³⁷

V. Now, however, we must fulfill our promise³⁸ and show if those words which we have attributed to the bride may not also be suitably assigned to the Bridegroom.

7. While the bride is conversing about the Bridegroom, he, as I have said, suddenly appears, yields to her desire by giving her a kiss, and so brings to fulfillment those words of the psalm: "You have granted him his heart's desire, not denied him what his lips entreated."³⁹ The filling up of her breasts is a proof of this. For so great is the potency of that holy kiss, that no sooner has the bride received it than she conceives and her breasts grow rounded with the fruitfulness of conception, bearing witness, as it were, with this milky abundance. Men with an urge to frequent prayer will have experience of what I say. Often enough when we approach the altar to pray our hearts are dry and lukewarm. But if we persevere, there comes an unexpected infusion of grace, our breast expands as it were, and our interior is filled with an overflowing love; and if somebody should press upon it then, this milk of sweet fecundity would gush forth in streaming richness. Let us hear the Bridegroom: "You have received, my love, what you asked for, and here is a sign to show you, your breasts are better than wine; henceforth you will know that you have received the kiss because you will be conscious of having conceived. That explains the expansion of your breasts, filled with a milky richness far surpassing the wine of the

35. 1 Tim 3:7.

36. Sermons 10–12.

37. Song 1:3.

38. Cf. n. 4 of this sermon.

39. Ps 20:3.

worldly knowledge that can intoxicate indeed but with curiosity, not charity; it fills but does not nourish; puffs up but does not build up;⁴⁰ pampers but does not strengthen."

VI. 8. Finally, let us imagine those words as coming from the Bridegroom's companions: "You are unjust," they say, "to murmur against the Bridegroom, because what he has already given you is of far more value than that which you look for. The favor you demand is rather for your own delight, but the breasts with which you may feed the offspring of your womb are preferable to, that is, they are more essential than, the wine of contemplation. What gladdens the heart of one man⁴¹ cannot be placed on equal terms with that which benefits many. Rachel may be more beautiful, but Lia is more fruitful.⁴² So beware of lingering amid the kisses of contemplation, better the breasts that flow in the preaching of God's word."

9. There is still another meaning that I did not really intend to place before you, but I must not exclude it. Why should we not allow that these words may be fittingly applied to those that are cared for by a mother or a nurse, as children are:⁴³ For these souls, immature, lacking in hardihood, cannot tolerate patiently the contemplative repose of her to whom they look for fuller instruction in the faith, for the guidance of her religious observances. And is it not the restlessness of such as these that is frowned upon in a subsequent verse, where they are forbidden with a grave warning to awake the loved one till she pleases:⁴⁴ When these perceive that the bride longs for kisses, that she seeks to be alone, that she shuns the streets, turns aside from the crowds and prefers her own peace to solicitude for them, they protest: "No!" they say. "No! Far greater the profit in the breasts you extend to others than in the embraces you enjoy in private. For by the former you deliver us from the selfish passions that attack the soul;⁴⁵ you snatch us from the world

40. 1 Cor 8:1.

41. Ps 103:15.

42. Gen 29:17-31. For other views of St Bernard on contemplation cf. his *Third Sermon for the Feast of the Assumption*, *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 8, Cistercian Fathers Series 26.

43. Rom 12:8.

44. Song 2:7.

45. 1 Pet 2:11.

and gain us for God." What they are really saying is: "Your breasts are better than wine." "These spiritual delights," they say, "that your breasts distill can conquer in us the pleasures of the flesh, that enslaved us just as drunkards are enslaved by wine."

10. This comparison of carnal pleasures with wine is so very apt. For the grape, once pressed, can never again exude its liquid, it is condemned to endless dryness. So too the flesh, caught in the wine-press of death, is completely drained of its co-natural pleasures, never again to revive to the stirring of sensual passions. Therefore the Prophet cried out: "All flesh is grass and its beauty like the wild flower's. The grass withers, the flower fades."⁴⁶ St Paul too bears witness: "If a man sows in the field of self-indulgence, he will get a harvest of corruption out of it."⁴⁷ Food is only meant for the stomach and the stomach for food; yes, and God is going to do away with both of them."⁴⁸ But this analogy may be applied to the world as well as to the flesh; for the world with all it craves for, is coming to an end.⁴⁹ Everything in the world indeed will come to an end, an end from which there is no return. Not so, however, the breasts we have spoken of. For when these have been drained dry they are replenished again from the maternal fount within, and offered to all who will drink. Here is a further reason why I insist that the breasts of the bride are superior to worldly or carnal love; the numbers who drink of them, however great, cannot exhaust their content; their flow is never suspended, for they draw unceasingly from the inward fountains of charity. Out of her heart shall flow rivers of water,⁵⁰ there will be a spring inside her, welling up to eternal life.⁵¹ The accumulating praises of the breasts come to a climax in the perfume of the ointments, because they not only feed us with the choice food of doctrine, but shed around them like a pleasing aroma the repute of good deeds. All else that these breasts may signify, what milk fills them, what be the ambient perfumes of her ointments—these I shall treat of later with the help of Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

46. Is 40:6-7.

49. 1 Jn 2:17.

47. Gal 6:8.

50. Jn 7:38.

48. 1 Cor 6:13.

51. Jn 4:14.

SERMON 10

THE BREASTS AND THEIR PERFUMES

I DO NOT PRETEND that, left to myself, I can make any new discovery, for the reason that I lack sufficient depth of understanding and powers of penetration. But the mouth of Paul is a mighty and unfailing fountain, ever open to us all;¹ and as I have often done before, so now too I draw from its resources in my attempt to interpret the breasts of the bride. "Rejoice," he said, "with those who rejoice, and be sad with those who sorrow."² In these few words we find the description of a mother's affections, because she shares both health and sickness with her children. She cannot avoid being conformed to them in the depths of her being in these experiences. Therefore, following Paul's guidance, I shall assign these two affective movements to the bride's two breasts, compassion to one, joyful sympathy to the other. For if she were not prompt to rejoice with those who rejoice, and ready to be sad with those who sorrow, her breasts would still be undeveloped; she would be no more than a girl too immature to marry.³ Should a person devoid of these affective qualities be confided with the direction of souls, or the work of preaching, he will do no good to others and great harm to himself. How utterly shameful then, if he should intrude himself into these tasks!

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

1. 2 Cor 6:11.

2. Rom 12:15.

3. Song 8:8.

Joyful sympathy yields the milk of encouragement, compassion that of consolation, and as often as the spiritual mother receives the kiss, so often does she feel each species flowing richly from heaven into her loving heart. And you may see her unhesitatingly nourishing her little ones with the milk of these full breasts, from one the milk of consolation, from the other that of encouragement, according to the need of each. For example, if she should notice that one of those whom she begot by preaching the Good News⁴ is assailed by temptation, that he becomes emotionally disturbed, is reduced to sadness and pusillanimity and therefore no longer capable of enduring the force of the temptation, will she not condole with him, caress him, weep with him, comfort him, and bring forward every possible evidence of God's love in order to raise him from his desolate state? If, on the contrary, she discovers that he is eager, active, progressive, her joy abounds, she plies him with encouraging advice, fans the fire of his zeal, imparts the ways of perseverance, and inspires him to ever higher ideals. She becomes all things to all, mirrors in herself the emotions of all and so shows herself to be a mother to those who fail no less than to those who succeed.

3. And if I may speak of those who have undertaken the direction of souls, how many there are today who reveal their lack of the requisite qualities! Only with a feeling of pain can I speak of this subject at all—how they melt down in the furnace of their covetousness the insults endured by Christ, the spittle, the scourging, the nails, the lance, the cross, his death itself, and squander them in the pursuit of shameful gain. The very price of the world's redemption is bundled into their purses; and only in this do they differ from Judas Iscariot, that he reckoned the total value of these things at a paltry sum of money,⁵ while they, with a more ravening greed, demand riches beyond counting. They display an insatiable passion for gains that they constantly fear to lose, and bewail after they have lost. In this love of money they find their rest, provided they are ever free from the anxiety of securing, or even further increasing, what they have acquired. Neither the peril of souls nor their salva-

4. 1 Cor 4:15.

5. Jn 12:5.

tion gives them any concern. They are certainly devoid of the maternal instinct. Grown fat, gross, bloated⁶ to excess on the heritage of the crucified Christ, "about the ruin of Joseph they do not care at all."⁷ There is no pretence about a true mother, the breasts that she displays are full for the taking. She knows how to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to be sad with those who sorrow,⁸ pressing the milk of encouragement without intermission from the breast of joyful sympathy, the milk of consolation from the breast of compassion. And with that I think we may desist from further discussion on the breasts of the bride and the milk that fills them.

III. 4. Now I shall try to explain the nature of the ointments of which the breasts are redolent, and so I ask the aid of your prayers that I may benefit my hearers by a worthy expression of the thoughts that inspire me. Just as the breasts of the Bridegroom differ from those of the bride, so do the ointments with which they are perfumed. In the previous sermon I have indicated the place in which I hope to speak of the Bridegroom's breasts.⁹ Here we must concentrate on the ointments of the bride with an attention worthy of the scriptural eulogy that commends them not merely as good but as the best. I mention several kinds of ointments, so that given a choice, we may select the ones that seem especially appropriate to the breasts of the bride. There is the ointment of contrition, that of devotion and that of piety. The first is pungent, causing some pain; the second mitigates and soothes pain; the third heals the wound and rids the patient of the illness. And now let us discuss each of these more extensively.

IV. 5. A soul entangled in many sins can prepare for itself a certain ointment once it begins to reflect on its behavior,¹⁰ and collects its many and manifold sins, heaps them together and crushes them in the mortar of its conscience. It cooks them, as it

6. Deut. 32:15.

9. Sermon 9:6.

7. Amos 6:6.

10. Ps 118:59.

8. Rom 12:15.

were, within a breast that boils up like a pot over the fire of repentance and sorrow, so that it can exclaim with the Prophet: "My heart became hot within me. As I mused the fire burned."¹¹ Here then is one ointment which the sinful soul should provide at the beginning of its conversion and apply to its still smarting wounds, for the first sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit.¹² And even though the sinner be poor and in want,¹³ devoid of the means to compound a better and more precious ointment, let him make sure in the meantime to prepare at least this one, no matter how degenerate the materials, because God will not scorn this crushed and broken heart.¹⁴ The more despicable he believes his offering to be because of his consciousness of sin, the more acceptable it will appear to God.

6. However, if we say that this invisible and spiritual ointment was symbolized by the visible ointment with which the sinful woman, as the Gospel describes, visibly anointed the corporeal feet of God, we cannot regard it as entirely worthless. For what do we read in the Gospel? "The house," it says, "was full of the scent of the ointment."¹⁵ It trickled from the hands of a courtesan,¹⁶ pouring over the feet, the body's extremities; and yet it was not so paltry, not so contemptible, as to prevent the house's being filled with the power of its aroma, the sweetness of its scent. So if we consider how great the fragrance with which the Church is perfumed in the conversion of one sinner, what a sweet smell of life leading to life¹⁷ each penitent can become! Provided that his repentance is wholehearted and visible to all, may we not with equal assurance say of him: "The house was full of the scent of the ointment." We can even say that this perfume of repentance reaches to the very abodes of the blessed in heaven because we have the witness of Truth itself that there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner.¹⁸ Rejoice then, you penitents; do not be afraid, you faint-hearted ones.¹⁹ I am speaking to those of you who have recently come to us from the world, who have renounced your sinful ways and are inevitably gripped by the bitterness and confusion of the

11. Ps 38:4.

14. Ps 50:19.

17. 2 Cor 2:16.

12. Ps 50:19.

15. Jn 12:3.

18. Lk 15:10.

13. Ps 73:21.

16. Song 5:5.

19. Is 35:4.

repentant soul that, like the pain of fresh wounds, torment and distract beyond bearing. Safely may your hands drip with the bitterness of myrrh²⁰ in the course of this salutary anointing, because God will not scorn this crushed and broken spirit.²¹ This kind of anointing, that not only inspires men to amend their lives but even makes the angels dance for joy, must not be easily spurned nor cheaply priced.

V. 7. But there is another ointment, more precious still, compounded of far superior elements. To obtain the elements of the former we do not have to travel far, we find them to hand without any trouble, and may cull them from our little gardens as often as necessity demands. For does not every man know, unless he deceives himself, that he has it within the power of his will to commit manifold sins and iniquities? But these, as you recognize, are the elements of the ointment we have just described.²² The spices of this second ointment, on the contrary, are not produced on our earth at all, we seek to gain them for ourselves from afar.²³ I mean that all that is good, everything that is perfect, is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light.²⁴ For this ointment is made from the gifts of God bestowed on the human race. Happy the man who makes it his business to gather these carefully for himself and keep them in mind with due thanksgiving. When they shall have been pounded and refined in the heart's receptacle with the pestle of frequent meditation, all of them fused together in the fire of holy desire, and finally enriched with the oil of gladness,²⁵ you will have an ointment more excellent than the former, and far more precious. Enough proof can be found in the words of him who said: "Whoever makes thanksgiving his sacrifice honors me."²⁶ No one doubts that the recalling of favors is an incentive to praise.

8. Furthermore, since the only thing that Scripture says of the former ointment is that God does not despise it,²⁷ it follows that the

20. Song 5:5.

23. Prov 31:13.

26. Ps 49:23.

21. Ps 50:19.

24. Jas 1:17.

27. Ps 50:19.

22. Sermon 10:4.

25. Ps 44:7.

second one, which especially glorifies him, is the more highly commended. Therefore the former is applied to the feet, the latter to the head. St Paul says: "God is the head of Christ,"²⁸ so in speaking of Christ we may understand the head as referring to his divinity, and it is beyond doubt that he who offers thanks anoints the head, because he makes contact with God, not man. I do not mean that he who is God is not also man, for the one Christ is both God and man; I mean that all things which are good, even those of which man is the agent, really come from God rather than man. "It is the Spirit," we are told, "that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer."²⁹ Hence there is a curse on the man who puts his trust in man,³⁰ for although our whole hope rightly depends on God made man, it is not because he is man but because he is God. Therefore the first ointment is applied to the feet, the second to the head, because the humiliation of a broken heart fittingly corresponds to the lowliness of the flesh,³¹ and honor is owed to majesty. See then what an ointment I have been describing for you, with which he before whom even the Principalities stand in awe, does not disdain to be anointed on the head. Rather does he regard it as a matter of signal honor, for he says: "Whoever makes thanksgiving his sacrifice honors me."³²

VI. 9. From all this we may conclude that the poor, the needy and the pusillanimous cannot prepare an ointment of this kind. Confidence alone can lay hold of its spices and ingredients, a confidence that is itself the fruit of liberty of spirit and purity of heart. The mind that is lacking in courage and of little faith, that is fettered by the scantiness of its own resources, is, through sheer indigence, deprived of the leisure that might be occupied with the praises of God or with that contemplation of his beneficence out of which praise is born. And if it does at times make a genuine attempt to scale the heights, almost at once it is pulled back to its native state by the pressing demands of domestic needs, and so by its very destitution it is forcibly confined within its own narrow limits. If

28. I Cor 11:3.

29. Jn 6:64.

30. Jer 17:5.

31. Ps 50:19.

32. Ps 49:23.

you ask of me the cause of this miserable state, I shall reveal something that, unless I be mistaken, you will recognize as either present now in yourselves, or as having once been present. The weakness and misgiving exhibited by this type of person seem to me usually to arise from either of two causes, from the fact that he has been but recently converted, or because he lives in a lukewarm fashion even though converted for long years. Both of these conditions humiliate, depress, and agitate the mind, since either because of its lukewarmness or because of the recentness it perceives the old passions of the soul to be still alive and it is forced to concentrate on cutting out from the garden of the heart the briars of sinful habits and the nettles of evil desires. Such a man cannot get away from himself. How else can it be? Can he who is worn out with groaning³³ exult at the same time in the praises of God? Isaiah talks of thanksgiving and the sound of music.³⁴ In what manner will it sound in the mouth of a man given over to groaning and lamenting? It is just as the Wise Man says: "A tale out of time is like music in mourning."³⁵ And of course thanksgiving is made after receiving a favor, not before. But the soul that still languishes in sadness is not enjoying a favor, rather it needs one. It has a good reason for offering prayers of petition, but scarcely a reason for returning thanks. How can it rejoice in the memory of a favor not yet received? Quite rightly then did I say that the man whose resources are poor is not called upon to prepare this ointment, for this is the work of one who can draw on the memory of divine favors. He whose gaze is held by the darkness cannot see the light. Bitterness holds him in its grip, the unpleasant recollection of his sins preoccupies his memory to the exclusion of every joyful thought. It is to souls like this that the Prophet says: "It is vain for you to rise before light."³⁶ He points out that it is useless for you to aspire to the contemplation of truths that give delight, until the sins that disquiet you have been blotted out in the light of consolation. This second ointment therefore is not a product of impoverished souls.

10. But let us take a look at those who may rightly boast of

33. Ps 6:7; Jer 45:3.

34. Is 51:3.

35. Sir 22:6.

36. Ps 126:2.

possessing an abundance of it. "They left the presence of the Sanhedrin glad to have had the honor of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name of Jesus."³⁷ They whose gentleness remained unshaken in the face both of reproaches and blows, had surely been filled from the overflowing richness of the Spirit. For they were rich in the charity that no amount of self-giving can exhaust; out of its resources they easily found what sufficed to offer up "fat holocausts."³⁸ Those drenched hearts of theirs poured out at random a holy unction, with which they were more fully imbued, when they proclaimed in various languages, according as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech, the marvels of God.³⁹ And surely we must believe that an abundance of these same ointments was lavished on those of whom St Paul says: "I never stop thanking God for all the graces you have received through Jesus Christ. I thank him that you have been enriched in so many ways, in all speech and in all knowledge; the witness to Christ has indeed been strong among you, so that you will not be without any of the gifts of the Spirit."⁴⁰ How I wish that I were able to offer thanks for similar graces on your behalf, that I might see you men rich in virtue,⁴¹ prompt to sing God's praises, overflowing with an increasing wealth of this spiritual anointing in Christ Jesus our Lord.

37. Acts 5:41.

40. 1 Cor 1:4-7.

38. Ps 65:15.

41. Sir 44:6.

39. Acts 2:4, 11.

SERMON 11

THANKSGIVING FOR CHRIST'S SAVING WORK

I SAID AT THE END of my last sermon, and I have no hesitation in repeating it, that I long to see you all sharing in that holy anointing, that religious attitude in which the benefits of God are recalled with gladness and thanksgiving. This involves a twofold grace: it lightens the burdens of the present life, makes them more supportable for those who can give themselves with joy to the work of praising God;¹ and nothing more appropriately represents on earth the state of life in the heavenly fatherland than spontaneity in this outpouring of praise. Scripture implies as much when it says: "Happy those who live in your house and can praise you all day long."² It was with a special reference to this anointing that the Prophet exclaimed: "How good, how delightful it is for all to live together like brothers; fine as oil on the head."³ These words do not seem applicable to the first anointing. Though that is good in itself, it is not by any means pleasant, because the recollection of one's sins begets bitterness rather than pleasure. Nor do those involved in it live together, since each one bewails and mourns over his own particular sins. Those, however, who are employed in the work of thanksgiving are contemplating and thinking about God alone, and so they cannot help but dwell in unity. That which they do is good because they offer to God the glory that is most rightly his; and it is also pleasant, since of its very nature it gives delight.

1. Zeph 3:17.

2. Ps 83:5.

3. Ps 132:1-2.

2. And for that reason my advice to you, my friends, is to turn aside occasionally from troubled and anxious pondering on the paths you may be treading, and to travel on smoother ways where the gifts of God are serenely savored, so that the thought of him may give breathing space to you whose consciences are perplexed. I should like you to experience for yourselves the truth of the holy Prophet's words: "Make the Lord your joy and he will give you what your heart desires."⁴ Sorrow for sin is indeed necessary, but it should not be an endless preoccupation. You must dwell also on the glad remembrance of God's loving-kindness, otherwise sadness will harden the heart and lead it more deeply into despair. Let us mix honey with our absinthe, it is more easily drunk when sweetened, and what bitterness it may still retain will be wholesome. You must fix your attention on the ways of God, see how he mitigates the bitterness of the heart that is crushed, how he wins back the pusillanimous soul from the abyss of despair, how he consoles the grief-stricken and strengthens the wavering with the sweet caress of his faithful promise. By the mouth of the Prophet he declares: "For my praise I will bridle you, lest you should perish."⁵ By this he seems to say: "Lest you should be cast down by excessive sadness at the sight of your sins, and rush despairingly to perdition like an unbridled horse over a precipice, I shall rein you in, I shall curb you with my mercy and set you on your feet with my praises. Then you will breathe freely again in the enjoyment of my benefits, overwhelmed though you be by evils of your own making, because you will find that my kindness is greater than your culpability." If Cain had been curbed by this kind of bridle he would never have uttered that despairing cry: "My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon."⁶ God forbid! God forbid! His loving mercy is greater than all iniquity. Hence the just man is not always accusing himself, he does so only in the opening words

4. Ps 36:4.

5. Is 48:9. Vulgate. St Bernard's version is slightly different.

6. Gen 4:13. Vulgate.

of his intercourse with God;⁷ he will normally conclude that intercourse with the divine praises. You can see therefore that the order of the just man's progress is expressed in the words: "After reflecting on my behavior, I turn my feet to your decrees,"⁸ that is, he who has endured grief and unhappiness in following his own ways can finally say: "In the way of your decrees lies my joy, a joy beyond all wealth."⁹ Therefore, if you are to follow the just man's example, if you are to form a humble opinion of yourselves, you must think of the Lord with goodness. So you are told in the Book of Wisdom: "Think of the Lord with goodness, seek him in simplicity of heart."¹⁰ You will all the more easily achieve this if you let your minds dwell frequently, even continually, on the memory of God's bountifulness. Otherwise, how will you fulfill St Paul's advice: "In all things give thanks to God,"¹¹ if your hearts will have lost sight of those things for which thanks are due: I would not have you bear the reproach flung at the Jews of old, who, according to Scripture, "had forgotten his achievements, the marvels he had shown them."¹²

II. 3. We must admit though that it is impossible for any man to remember and recount all the benefits that the Lord, so merciful and tender-hearted,¹³ ceaselessly bestows on mortal men, for who can recount the Lord's triumphs, who can praise him enough?¹⁴ Yet one at least of his benefits, the work by which he redeemed us, his chief and greatest achievement, should by no means be allowed to slip from the memory of the redeemed. Concerning this work I wish to suggest for your consideration two important points that now occur to me, which I shall state as briefly as possible in accord with the Wise Man's saying: "Give the wise man an opportunity, he grows wiser still."¹⁵ The two are these: manner and fruit. The

7. Prov 18:17. St Bernard's rendering is not found in the Vulgate. It is a Latin version of the Greek Septuagint text also to be found in writings of the early Fathers. Cf. St Ambrose, *De Offic. Ministrorum*, bk. I, c. 25; and St Cyril, *In Joan*, bk. II, c. 14.

8. Ps 118:59.

11. 1 Thess 5:18.

14. Ps 105:2.

9. Ps 118:14.

12. Ps 77:11.

15. Prov 9:9.

10. Wis 1:1.

13. Ps 110:4.

manner involved the self-emptying of God, the fruit was that we should be filled with him. Meditation on the former is the seed-bed of holy hope, meditation on the latter an incentive to the highest love. Both of them are essential for our progress, because hope without love is the lot of the time-server, and love without reward grows cold.

4. I shall add, too, that the fruit we must expect as our love's fulfillment should be worthy of the promise of him whom we love: "A full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap."¹⁶ And that measure, as I have heard, will be without measure.¹⁷

III. But what I should like to know, however, is the nature of that which is to be measured out, what that immense reward is which has been promised. "The eye has not seen, O God, besides you, what things you have prepared for them that love you."¹⁸ Tell us then, since you do the preparing, tell us what it is you prepare. We believe, we are confident, that in accordance with your promise, "we shall be filled with the good things of your house."¹⁹ But—I persist in asking—what are these good things, what are they like? Would it be with corn and wine and oil,²⁰ with gold and silver or precious stones? But these are things that we have known and seen, that we have grown weary of seeing. We seek for the things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man.²¹ To search after these things, whatever they may be, is a source of pleasure and relish and delight. "They will all be taught by God,"²² says Scripture, and he will be all in all.²³ As I see it, the fullness that we hope for from God will be only something of God himself.

5. Who indeed can comprehend what an abundance of goodness²⁴ is contained in that brief expression: "God will be all in all";²⁵

16. Lk 6:38.

17. Jn 3:34.

18. Is 64:4. Vulgate has "wait for you." See JB, note b, p. 1243.

19. Ps 64:5.

20. Ps 4:8.

21. 1 Cor 2:9.

22. Jn 6:45.

23. 1 Cor 15:28.

24. Ps 30:20.

25. 1 Cor 15:28.

Not to speak of the body, I discern in the soul three faculties, the reason, the will, the memory, and these three may be said to be identified with the soul itself.²⁶ Everyone who is "guided by the Spirit"²⁷ realizes how greatly in the present life these three are lacking in integrity and perfection. And what reason can there be for this, except that God is not yet "all in all"? Hence it comes about that the reason very often falters in its judgments, the will is agitated by a fourfold perturbation²⁸ and the memory confused by its endless forgetfulness. Man, noble though he be, was unwillingly subjected to this triple form of futility, but hope nonetheless was left to him.²⁹ For he who satisfies with good the desire of the soul³⁰ will one day himself be for the reason fullness of light, for the will, the fullness of peace, for the memory, eternity's uninterrupted flow. O truth! O love! O eternity! Oh blessed and beatifying Trinity! To you the wretched trinity that I bear within me sends up its doleful yearnings because of the unhappiness of its exile. Departing from you, in what errors, what pains, what fears it has involved itself! Unhappy me! What a trinity we have won in exchange for you! "My heart is throbbing," and hence my pain; "my strength is deserting me" and hence my fear; "the light of my eyes itself has left me,"³¹ and hence my error. O trinity of my soul, how utterly different the Trinity you have offended in your exile.

6. And still, why so downcast, my soul, why do you sigh within me? Put your hope in God. I shall praise him yet,³² when error will have gone from the reason, pain from the will, and every trace

26. St Bernard here seems to hold that there is no distinction between the soul and its faculties. This doctrine, also accepted by St Bonaventure, was taught by Avicenna who died in 1037, over 50 years before Bernard was born. The debate still goes on. The school of Jung, including some Catholics, maintain the identity of soul and faculties; followers of St Thomas Aquinas hold for a real distinction between them. See, H. Grenier, *Cursus Philosophiae*, vol. 1, p. 350; J. Donceel, *Philosophical Psychology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), pp. 2ff.

27. Gal 5:16, 25.

28. He refers here to the four passions, love, joy, fear and sadness, which he treats of in Sermon Fifty of the Occasional Sermons, Cistercian Fathers Series 49.

29. Rom 8:20.

30. Ps 102:5.

31. Ps 37:11.

32. Ps 41:6.

of fear from the memory. Then will come that state for which we hope, with its admirable serenity, its fullness of delight, its endless security. The God who is truth is the source of the first of these gifts; the God who is love, of the second; the God who is all-powerful, of the third. And so it will come to pass that God will be all in all,³³ for the reason will receive unquenchable light, the will imperturbable peace, the memory an unfailing fountain from which it will draw eternally. I wonder if it seems right to you that we should assign that first operation to the Son, the second to the Holy Spirit, the last to the Father. In doing so, however, we must beware of excluding either the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit from any one of these communications, lest the distinction of Persons should diminish the divine fullness proper to each of them, or their perfection be so understood as to annul the personal properties. Consider too that the children of this world³⁴ experience a corresponding threefold temptation from the allurements of the flesh, the glitter of life in the world, the self-fulfillment patterned on Satan. These three include all the artifices by which the present life deceives its unhappy lovers, even as St John proclaimed: "All that is in the world is the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life."³⁵ So much for the fruit of the redemption.

7. Now with regard to the manner, which if you remember, we defined as God's self-emptying,³⁶ I venture to offer three important points for your consideration. For that emptying was neither a simple gesture nor a limited one; but he emptied himself even to the assuming of human nature, even to accepting death, death on a cross.³⁷ Who is there that can adequately gauge the greatness of the humility, gentleness, self-surrender, revealed by the Lord of majesty in assuming human nature, in accepting the punishment of death, the shame of the cross? But somebody will say: "Surely the Creator could have restored his original plan without all that hardship?" Yes, he could, but he chose the way of personal suffering so that man would never again have a reason to display that worst

33. 1 Cor 15:28.

36. Sermon 9:3.

34. Lk 16:8; 20:34.

37. Phil 2:7f.

35. 1 Jn 2:16.

and most hateful of all vices, ingratitude. If his decision did involve painful weariness for himself, it was meant also to involve man in a debt that only great love can pay. Where the ease with which man was created sapped his spirit of devotion, the hardship with which he was redeemed should urge him on to gratitude. For how did man the ingrate regard his creation? "I was created freely indeed but with no trouble or labor on my Creator's part; for at his command I was made,³⁸ just like every other thing. What is big about that gift if not the great facility of the word that made it?" Thus does human impiety belittle the boon of creation, and turn that which of its nature is a source of love into an occasion for ingratitude. Those who live by these sentiments share the godlessness of evil-doers.³⁹ But these lying mouths are silenced.⁴⁰ For, more obvious than the light of day is the immense sacrifice he has made for you, O man; he who was Lord became a slave, he who was rich became a pauper, the Word was made flesh, and the Son of God did not disdain to become the son of man. So may it please you to remember that, even if made out of nothing, you have not been redeemed out of nothing. In six days he created all things, and among them, you. On the other hand, for a period of thirty whole years he worked your salvation in the midst of the earth.⁴¹ What endurance was his in those labors! To his bodily needs and the molestations of his enemies did he not add the mightier burden of the ignominy of the cross, and crown it all with the horror of his death? And this was indeed necessary. Man and beast you save, O Lord. How you have multiplied your mercy, O God.⁴²

8. Meditate on these things, turn them over continually in your minds. Refresh those hearts of yours with perfumes such as these, hearts writhing so long under the repugnant odor of your sins. May you abound with these ointments, as sweet as they are salutary. But yet, you must beware of thinking that you now possess those superior ones that are commended to us in the breasts of the bride. The necessity of bringing this sermon to an end does not allow me

38. Ps 148:5.

39. Ps 140:4.

40. Ps 62:12.

41. Ps 73:12.

42. Ps 35:7f.

to begin discussing them now. But all that has been said about the others you must retain in your memory and reveal in your way of life; and do please help me with your prayers that I may worthily portray with appropriate sentiments those superior delights of the bride, that I may fill your own souls with the love of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON 12

THE GRACE OF LOVING-KINDNESS

AS I RECALL, I have been discussing two ointments with you:¹ one of contrition, that takes account of numerous sins, the other of devotion, that embodies numerous benefits. Both are wholesome experiences but not both pleasant. The first one is known to carry a sting, because the bitter remembrance of sins incites compunction and causes pain, whereas the second is soothing, it brings consolation through a knowledge of God's goodness and so assuages pain. But there is another ointment, far excelling these two, to which I give the name loving-kindness, because the elements that go to its making are the needs of the poor, the anxieties of the oppressed, the worries of those who are sad, the sins of wrong-doers, and finally, the manifold misfortunes of people of all classes who endure affliction, even if they are our enemies. These elements may seem rather depressing, but the ointment made from them is more fragrant than all other spices.² It bears the power to heal, for "Happy the merciful; they shall have mercy shown them."³ A collection therefore of manifold miseries on which the eye rests with loving-kindness, represents the ingredients from which the best ointments are made, ointments that are worthy of the breasts of the bride and capable of winning the Bridegroom's attention. Happy the mind that has been wise enough to enrich and adorn itself with an assortment of spices such as these, pouring upon them the oil of mercy and warming them with the

1. Cf. Sermon 10:4.

2. Song 4:10.

3. Mt 5:7.

fire of charity! Who, in your opinion, is the good man who takes pity and lends,⁴ who is disposed to compassionate, quick to render assistance, who believes that there is more happiness in giving than in receiving,⁵ who easily forgives but is not easily angered, who will never seek to be avenged, and will in all things take thought for his neighbor's needs as if they were his own? Whoever you may be, if your soul is thus disposed, if you are saturated with the dew of mercy, overflowing with affectionate kindness, making yourself all things to all men⁶ yet pricing your deeds like something discarded⁷ in order to be ever and everywhere ready to supply to others what they need, in a word, so dead to yourself that you live only for others—if this be you, then you obviously and happily possess the third and best of all ointments and your hands have dripped with liquid myrrh that is utterly enchanting.⁸ It will not run dry in times of stress nor evaporate in the heat of persecution; but God will perpetually “remember all your oblations and find your holocaust acceptable.”⁹

2. There are men of riches in the city of the Lord of hosts.¹⁰ I wonder if some among them possess these ointments.

II. As invariably happens, the first to spring to my mind is that chosen vessel,¹¹ St Paul, truly a vessel of myrrh and frankincense and every perfume the merchant knows.¹² He was Christ's incense to God¹³ in every place. His heart was a fountain of sweet fragrance that radiated far and wide, seized as he was with an anxiety for all the churches.¹⁴ See what those ingredients were, those spices that he had accumulated for himself: “I face death every day,” he said, “for your glory.”¹⁵ And again: “Who was weak, and I was not weak with him? Who was scandalized, and I did not burn?”¹⁶ Many similar passages, well known to all of you, show how prolific this rich man was in compounding the best of ointments. It was so fitting that the breasts which fed the members of Christ should be

4. Ps III:5.

5. Acts 20:35.

6. I Cor 9:22.

7. Ps 30:13.

8. Song 5:5.

9. Ps 19:4.

10. Ps 47:9.

11. Acts 9:15.

12. Song 3:6.

13. 2 Cor 2:15.

14. 2 Cor 11:28.

15. I Cor 15:31.

16. 2 Cor 11:29.

redolent of the finest and purest of spices; they were members to whom Paul was truly a mother, giving birth to them all over and over again, until Christ was formed in them,¹⁷ that the members might be renewed in the likeness of their head.

3. Another man too, rich in the possession of these choice materials from which he prepared ointments of superior quality, said: "No stranger ever had to sleep outside, my door was always open to the travellers;"¹⁸ and again: "I was eyes for the blind, and feet for the lame. Who but I was father of the poor? I used to break the fangs of wicked men, and snatch their prey from between their jaws."¹⁹ Have I been insensible to poor men's needs, or let a widow's eyes grow dim? Or taken my share of bread alone, not giving a share to the orphan?²⁰ Have I ever seen a wretch in need of clothing, or a beggar going naked, without his having cause to bless me from his heart, as he felt the warmth of the fleece from my lambs?"²¹ What a sweet perfume that man must have radiated throughout the earth by works such as these? Every action bore its own aroma. Even his own conscience was filled with accumulating perfumes, so that pleasant odors from within tempered the stench of his rotting flesh.

4. Joseph, after he had drawn all the Egyptians to run after him to the odor of his ointments,²² ultimately proffered the same perfumed favor to the very men who had sold him. He began indeed by angrily reproaching them, but could not for long restrain the tears that burst forth from the fullness of his heart, tears that effaced the signs of anger and betrayed his love.²³ Samuel mourned for Saul, the man who was intent on killing him; his heart grew warm with the fire of charity, his spirit melted within him, and love made him weep.²⁴ And because his reputation was diffused abroad like a perfume, Scripture tells of him that "all Israel from Dan to Beersheba came to know that Samuel was accredited as a prophet of the Lord."²⁵ What shall I say of Moses? With what a

17. Gal 4:19.

20. Job 31:16f.

23. Gen 42:7; 43:30.

18. Job 31:32.

21. Job 31:19f.

24. 1 Sam 15:35.

19. Job 29:15ff.

22. Song 1:3.

25. 1 Sam 3:20.

rich feast did he not fill his heart:²⁶ Not even that rebellious house²⁷ in which for a time he sojourned, could destroy by its rude anger the spiritual grace bestowed on him at the beginning of his career. His gentleness remained unshaken despite unremitting discords and conflicts day after day. Well did he deserve that testimony of the Holy Spirit that he was the humblest man on earth.²⁸ For with them that hated peace he was peaceable,²⁹ since he not only curbed his anger in face of an ungrateful and rebellious people, but even appeased by his intervention the anger of God, as Scripture says: "He talked of putting an end to them and would have done, if Moses his chosen had not stood in the breach, confronting him, deflecting his destructive anger."³⁰ He even went so far as to say: "If it please you to forgive, forgive. But if not, then blot me out from the book that you have written."³¹ Surely a man truly filled with the grace of mercy! Clearly he speaks as a mother would for whom there is no delight or happiness that is not shared by her children. For instance, if a wealthy man should say to a poverty-stricken woman: "Come and join me at dinner, but better leave outside the child in your arms, his crying will only disturb us," do you think she would do it? Would she not rather choose to fast than to put away the child so dear to her and dine alone with the rich man? Hence Moses was resolved not to go alone to join in his Master's happiness,³² while those people to whom he clung as a mother, with all a mother's affection despite their restlessness and ingratitude, remained outside. Inwardly he suffered, but he judged that suffering to be more tolerable than separation from them.

5. Who was more gentle than David who bewailed the death of the man who had ever thirsted for his own?³³ What greater evidence of kindness could there be than his unhappiness at the demise of him into whose place he stepped as king? How hard it was to console him when his parricidal son was killed!³⁴ Affection such as this certainly witnessed to an abundance of the best ointment. Therefore there is an assured ring in the words of that prayer: "O

26. Ps 62:6.

27. Ezek 2:5.

28. Num 12:3.

29. Ps 119:7.

30. Ps 105:23. Cf. Ex 32:11ff.

31. Ex 32:31f.

32. Mt 25:21.

33. 2 Sam 1:11f.

34. 2 Sam 19:4.

Lord, remember David and all his meekness.”³⁵ All these persons possessed the best ointments and even today diffuse their perfumes through all the churches. A similar influence is achieved by those too who, in the course of this life have been indulgent and charitable, who have made an effort to show kindness to their fellow-men, not vindicating to themselves alone any grace they were gifted with, but exercising it for the common good in the consciousness that they owe a duty to enemies no less than friends, to the wise just as much as to the unwise.³⁶ Since their purpose was to be of help to everybody they evinced a great humility before all in all that they did, they were beloved by God and men,³⁷ their good odor a perfume in the memory. Men like these, whatever their number, permeated their own times and today, too, with the best of ointments.³⁸

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

35. Ps 131:1. According to the tradition based on 2 Chron 6:14f., this psalm was sung by Solomon at the dedication of the temple. Some modern authors tend to disagree with this and say it was more probably composed when the house of David was overthrown in spite of Nathan’s prophecy of its permanence (Cf. 2 Sam 7:5–16). It may date from the reign of Joachim, released from a Babylonian prison in 561 B.C. Cf. P. Boylan, *The Psalms*, vol. 2 (Dublin: Gill & Son Ltd., 1948); E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 2 (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1954).

36. Rom 1:14.

37. Sir 45:1.

38. Song 1:2.

loves his brothers and the people of Israel; this is a man who prays much for the people and for the holy city.”³⁹

IV. 6. But let us turn to the Gospels to see if they contain any reference to these perfumes. “Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices with which to go and anoint Jesus.”⁴⁰ What were these ointments, so precious that they were bought and prepared for the body of Christ, so abundant that they sufficed to anoint every part of it? For nowhere do we find that the other two ointments were either bought or specially prepared for use on the body of Christ, or that they were spread over every part of it. There is a moment when we are suddenly brought face to face with a woman who in one place kisses Christ’s feet and covers them with a perfume,⁴¹ and in another either she or a different woman brings in an alabaster box of ointment and pours it on his head.⁴² But in this instance we are told: “They bought spices with which to go and anoint Jesus.”⁴³ They buy spices, not ointments; the ointment for his body was not bought ready made, a totally new one was prepared; and not for application merely to a part of his body such as the feet or the head, but—as is indicated in the words: “to anoint Jesus”—to cover his whole body, not any particular part.

7. You too, if you are to become deeply compassionate,⁴⁴ must behave generously and kindly not only to parents and relatives, or those from whom you have received or hope to receive a good turn—after all non-Christians do as much⁴⁵—but, following Paul’s advice, you must make the effort to do good to all.⁴⁶ Inspired by this God-oriented purpose, you will never refuse to do an act of charity, whether spiritual or corporal, to an enemy, or withdraw

39. 2 Mac 15:14.

40. Mk 16:1.

41. Lk. 7:37f.

42. Mt 26:7f.; Mk 14:3f. Bernard’s doubts about the identity of these women have still not been satisfactorily solved. The JB holds that the sinful woman of Lk 7:37f. is most probably not Mary of Magdala, mentioned in Lk. 8:2, nor Mary the sister of Martha, Lk 10:39. McKenzie (*Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 552) also denies that the sinful woman of Lk 7:37 and Mary of Magdala are the same. Nor does he think that Mary of Bethany may be identified with Mary of Magdala.

43. Mk 16:1.

44. Col 3:12.

45. Mt 5:47.

46. Gal 6:10.

it once offered. It will thus be clear that you abound with the best ointments, that you have undertaken to care not only for the head or feet of the Lord, but, as far as in you lies, for his whole body which is the Church.⁴⁷ It was perhaps for this reason the Lord Jesus would not allow the mixture of spices to be used on his dead body, he wished to reserve it for his living body. For that Church which eats the living bread which has come down from heaven is alive:⁴⁸ she is the more precious Body of Christ that was not to taste death's bitterness, whereas every Christian knows that his other body did suffer death.⁴⁹ His will is that she be anointed, that she be cared for, that her sick members be restored to health with remedies that are the fruit of diligence. It was for her that he withheld these precious ointments, when, anticipating the hour and hastening the glory of his resurrection, he eluded the women's devout purpose only to give it new direction. Mercy and not contempt was the reason for this refusal; the service was not spurned but postponed that others might benefit. And the benefit I refer to is not the fruit of this material thing, this anointing of the body; it is a spiritual benefit symbolized by it. On this occasion he who is the teacher of religious devotion refused these choice ointments that are symbols of devotion, because it was his absolute wish that they be used for the spiritual and corporal welfare of his needy members. A short time previously, when valuable ointment was poured on his head and even on his feet, did he try to prevent it? Did he not rather oppose those who objected to it?⁵⁰ Simon, indignant that he should allow a sinful woman to touch him, received a stern rebuke in the course of a long parable, while others who grumbled at the waste of the ointment were silenced with the question: "Why are you upsetting the woman?"⁵¹

V. 8. There have been times, if I may digress a little, when as I sat down sadly⁵² at the feet of Jesus, offering up my distressed spirit in sacrifice, recalling my sins,⁵³ or again, at the rare moments

47. Col 1:24.

50. Lk 7:39ff.

53. Ps 50:19.

48. Jn 6:51.

51. Mt 26:10.

49. Heb 2:9.

52. Ezra 9:3.

when I stood by his head, filled with happiness at the memory of his favors, I could hear people saying: "Why this waste?"⁵⁴ They complained that I thought only of myself when, in their view, I could be working for the welfare of others. In effect they said: "This could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."⁵⁵ But what a poor transaction for me, to forfeit my own life and procure my own destruction, even if I should gain the whole world!⁵⁶ Hence I compared such talk to the scriptural mention of dead flies that spoil the perfumed oil,⁵⁷ and remembered the words of God: "O my people, those who praise you lead you into error."⁵⁸ But let those who accuse me of indolence listen to the Lord who takes my part with the query: "Why are you upsetting this woman?"⁵⁹ By this he means: "You are looking at the surface of things and therefore you judge superficially."⁶⁰ This is not a man, as you think, who can handle great enterprises, but a woman.⁶¹ Why then try to impose on him a burden that to my mind he cannot endure?⁶² The work that he performs for me is good,⁶³ let him be satisfied with this good until he finds strength to do better. If he eventually emerges from womanhood to manhood, to mature manhood,⁶⁴ then let him engage in a work of corresponding dignity."

VI. 9. My brothers, let us give due honor to bishops but have a wholesome fear of their jobs, for if we comprehend the nature of their jobs we shall not hanker after the honor. Let us admit that our powers are unequal to the task, that our soft effeminate shoulders cannot be happy in supporting burdens made for men. It is not for us to pry into their business but to pay them due respect. For it is surely churlish to censure their doings if you shun their responsibilities; you are no better than the woman at home spinning, who foolishly reprimands her husband returning from the battle. And I add: if a monk happens to notice that a prelate working in his diocese lives with less constraint than he, and with less circum-

54. Mt 26:8.

57. Eccles 10:1

60. Mk 12:14.

63. Mk 14:6.

55. Mt 26:9.

58. Is 3:12.

61. Prov 31:19

64. Eph 4:13

56. Mt 16:26.

59. Mt 26:10.

62. Acts 15:10

spection; that he speaks more freely, eats as he pleases, sleeps when he will, laughs spontaneously, gives rein to anger, passes judgment readily, let him not rush precipitately to wrong conclusions, but rather call to mind the Scripture: "Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good."⁶⁵ For you do well in keeping a vigilant eye on your own behavior, but the man who helps many acts with more virile purpose fulfilling a higher duty. And if in the performance of this duty he is guilty of some imperfection, if his life and behavior are less than regular, remember that love covers a multitude of sins.⁶⁶ I want this to be a warning against that twofold temptation with which the devil assails men in religious life: to covet the fame of a bishop's status, and to pass rash judgment on his excesses.

VII. 10. But let us get back to the ointments of the bride. Do you not see how that ointment of merciful love, the only one that may not be wasted, is to be preferred to the others? The fact that not even the gift of a cup of cold water goes unrewarded shows that nothing actually is wasted.⁶⁷ The ointment of contrition of course is good, made up as it is from the recollection of past sins and poured on the Lord's feet, because "You will not scorn, O God, this crushed and broken heart."⁶⁸ But better by far is the ointment of devotion, distilled from the memory of God's beneficence, and worthy of being poured on Christ's head. Concerning it we have God's own witness: "Whoever makes thanksgiving his sacrifice honors me."⁶⁹ The function of merciful love, however, is superior to both; it works for the welfare of the afflicted and is diffused through the whole Body of Christ. By this I do not mean the body which was crucified, but the one that he acquired by his passion. An ointment that by its excellence blinds him to the worth of the other two is beyond question the best, for he said: "What I want is mercy, not sacrifice."⁷⁰ This, more than all the other virtues, is diffused like a perfume from the breasts of the bride, who desires to conform in all things to the will of her Bridegroom.

65. Sir 42:14.
68. Ps 50:19.

66. 1 Pet 4:8.
69. Ps 49:23.

67. Mt 10:42.
70. Mt 9:13.

Was it not the fragrance of mercy that enveloped the death-bed of Tabitha.⁷¹ And like a life-giving perfume, it hastened her resurgence from death.

II. Finally a few brief words to end this present subject. The man whose speech intoxicates and whose good deeds radiate may take as addressed to himself the words: "Your breasts are better than wine, redolent of the best ointments."⁷² Now who is worthy of such a commendation? Which of us can live uprightly and perfectly even for one hour, an hour free from fruitless talk and careless work? Yet there is one who truthfully and unhesitatingly can glory in this praise. She is the Church, whose fullness is a never-ceasing fount of intoxicating joy, perpetually fragrant. For what she lacks in one member she possesses in another according to the measure of Christ's gift⁷³ and the plan of the Spirit who distributes to each one just as he chooses.⁷⁴ The Church's fragrance is radiated by those who use their money, tainted though it be, to win themselves friends;⁷⁵ she intoxicates by the words of her preachers, who drench the earth and make it drunk⁷⁶ with the wine of spiritual gladness, and yield a harvest through their perseverance.⁷⁷ With the bold assurance of one confident that her breasts are better than wine and redolent of the choicest perfumes,⁷⁸ she lays claim to the title of bride. And although none of us will dare arrogate for his own soul the title of bride of the Lord, nevertheless we are members of the Church which rightly boasts of this title and of the reality that it signifies, and hence may justifiably assume a share in this honor. For what all of us simultaneously possess in a full and perfect manner, that each single one of us undoubtedly possesses by participation. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your kindness in uniting us to the Church you so dearly love, not merely that we may be endowed with the gift of faith, but that like brides we may be one with you in an embrace that is sweet, chaste and eternal, beholding with unveiled faces⁷⁹ that glory which is yours in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

71. Acts 9:36ff.

74. I Cor 12:11.

77. Lk 8:15.

72. Song 1:1f.

75. Lk 16:9.

78. Song 1:1f.

73. Eph 4:7.

76. Ps 64:10.

79. 2 Cor 3:18.

SERMON 13

OUR THANKSGIVING AND GOD'S GLORY

JUST AS THE SEA is the ultimate source of wells and rivers, so Christ the Lord is the ultimate source of all virtue and knowledge. For who has power to endow us with virtues if not he who is the King of Glory?¹ And what are we told in the canticle of Anna but that God himself is the Lord of all knowledge?² Hence from him as from a well-head comes the power to be pure in body, diligent in affection and upright in will. Nor is this all. From him too come subtlety of intellect, splendor of eloquence, urbanity of bearing; from him, knowledge and words of wisdom. Indeed in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.³ Shall I add still more? Chaste thoughts, just judgments, holy desires—are they not all streams from that one spring? If the waters that surround us inevitably return to the sea by hidden underground channels, only to gush forth again without fail and without weariness for the refreshing of our sight and the relief of our needs, why should not those spiritual streams return unerringly and without ceasing to their native source, and flow back without interruption to irrigate our souls? Let the rivers of grace circle back to their Fountain-Head that they may run their course anew.⁴ Let the torrent that springs in heaven be channelled back to its starting point, and be poured on the earth again with fertilizing power. You ask how this will be done. It will be done in accord with Paul's advice:

1. Ps 23:10.

2. 1 Sam 2:3.

3. Col 2:3.

4. Eccles 1:7.

"In all things give thanks to God."⁵ If you can credit yourself with wisdom or with virtue, realize that the credit is due rather to Christ, who is the Power and the Wisdom of God.⁶

II. 2. "Who is so mad," you say, "as to presume otherwise?" Actually nobody. Even the Pharisee gives thanks,⁷ although his justice merits no praise from God.⁸ And if, as the Gospel points out, his act of thanksgiving does not increase his grace, why is this so? Because the pieties that our mouths proclaim will not justify the pride of our heart in the sight of him who is repelled by the arrogant.⁹ "God is not mocked,"¹⁰ O Pharisee. What do you have that was not given to you?"¹¹ "Nothing," he says, "and therefore I offer thanks to the giver." "But if there is really nothing, then you had no antecedent merit to warrant your reception of the things of which you boast. And if you admit this, then in the first place it is futile to give yourself airs at the expense of the publican who does not possess as much as you because he has not received as much. Secondly, make sure you realize that God's gifts are entirely his own; if you attribute to yourself some of the glory and honor that are his, you may deservedly be convicted of fraud, of attempting to defraud God. If you brazenly boast of gifts as though they were your own, I should prefer to believe you are deceived, not that you wish to defraud. It is an error I should hope to correct. But when you make thanksgiving, you manifest that you regard nothing as your own, you wisely acknowledge that your merits are really God's gifts. When you despise others, however, you betray the inner reality of your condition, you are speaking from a double heart,¹² with one lending your tongue to a lie, with the other usurping the honor due to truth. Never would you judge the publican more despicable than yourself if you did not consider that you are more honorable than he. But how will you reply to the principle laid down by the Apostle: 'Honor and glory to the only God?'¹³ How reply to the angels who in their teaching distinguish

5. 1 Thess 5:18.

8. 1 Cor 4:5.

11. 1 Cor 4:7.

6. 1 Cor 1:24.

9. Ps 137:6.

12. Ps 11:3.

7. Lk 18:11.

10. Gal 6:7.

13. 1 Tim 1:17.

between what God reserves for himself and what he is willing to share with men? Their song is: 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to men of good-will.'"¹⁴ Do you not perceive that the Pharisee, in offering thanks, honors God with his lips but in his heart pays tribute to himself?¹⁵ And so, through force of habit more than by intention or inclination, you will hear people of all sorts pronouncing words of thanks, for even the wickedest persons will offer a perfunctory thanks to God in achieving a sexual conquest, for any kind of crime because things fell out well and prosperous, at least according to their estimation, when their perverse will was fulfilled. For instance, when the thief has bagged the loot for which he has planned, he celebrates in the privacy of his hide-out and says: "Thank God! I have not watched in vain, the night's work has not been wasted." The murderer will brag and express his thanks for the overthrow of a rival, for having had revenge on an enemy. And the adulterer will utter an irreverent "Thank you God," as he capers with delight on having gone to bed at last with the woman he has long pursued.

III. 3. It is clear then that God will listen only to the thanks that spring from a pure and genuine simplicity of heart. I say "pure heart," because when those who boast of their evil conduct presume to thank God for it, they bring him down to the level of their own profligacy and make him share their wicked pleasures.¹⁶ God says to people of this kind: "Do you really think I am like you? I charge, I indict you to your face."¹⁷ I have added the word "genuine" because of the hypocrites who praise God for the goods they possess, but only with their lips; the heart denies what the tongue professes, and since they act deceitfully in God's very sight, their knavery can merit only hatred.¹⁸ The former impiously seek to involve God in their evil doings; the latter, by a fraudulent twist, would make God's gifts their own. The vice of the former is so stupid, so worldly, and even in a sense so brutish, that I do not feel impelled to put you on your guard against it; that of the latter,

14. Lk 2:14.

15. Mt 15:8; Is 29:13.

16. Prov 2:14.

17. Ps 49:21.

18. Ps 35:3.

however, constitutes an habitual temptation in the lives of religious and spiritual persons. Great and rare is the virtue of those who do great things without becoming conscious of their greatness, whose holiness is manifest to all but to themselves. To me there is no virtue like that, when you are universally admired, and remain contemptible in your own eyes. You are indeed a faithful servant if you do not try to grasp for yourself the manifold glory of God, which while not coming from you, nevertheless passes through you. Then, in the words of the Prophet, you reject extortionate profit and wave away bribes from your hands.¹⁹ Then, in accord with the Lord's command, your light shines before men, not for your own glory but for that of your Father in heaven.²⁰ An imitator of Paul and of all the loyal preachers who would not preach themselves,²¹ you seek not your own interests but those of Jesus Christ.²² Consequently you too will be privileged to hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have shown you can be faithful in small things, I will trust you with greater."²³

4. Although Joseph knew that he was entrusted with the care of his Egyptian master's home and all its goods, he was also aware that its mistress was an exception, and he refused to have relations with her. "My master," he said, "has handed over all his possession to me. He has withheld nothing from me except yourself, because you are his wife."²⁴ He knew that woman is the reflection of man's glory, and that it would be base ingratitude on his part to tarnish the honor of the man by whose will he had been raised to honor. Gifted with the wisdom of God, he perceived that a husband is extremely concerned about his wife's honor because identified with his own; so much his own that he will not entrust her to another. Hence he would not presume to tamper with what was outside his control.

VI. What then? Shall a man be jealous of his own glory and yet dare to wish to defraud God of his, as if God were indifferent?

19. Is 33:15.

22. Phil 2:21.

20. Mt 5:16.

23. Mt 25:21.

21. 2 Cor 4:5.

24. Gen 39:9.

But God says otherwise: "I will not yield my glory to another."²⁵ "But what will you give to us, O Lord, what will you give to us?" "Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you."²⁶ "It is enough for me; I accept gratefully what you give and I give up what you keep for yourself. This contents me, I do not doubt that it is for my advantage. I renounce all claim to glory lest by usurping what you do not permit, I may deservedly lose what you offer. I wish for peace, I yearn for it and for nothing more. The man who is not satisfied with peace is not satisfied with you. For you are our peace, you have made us both one."²⁷ To be reconciled with you, to be reconciled with myself, this is necessary for me, and it suffices. For whenever you set me in opposition to you I become a burden to myself.²⁸ I am on my guard, and will neither be ungrateful for the gift of peace nor intrude sacrilegiously on your glory. May your glory remain yours, O Lord, in undiminished splendor; all will be well with me if I shall have your peace."

5. After the overthrow of Goliath the people were happy to have peace restored; David alone basked in the glory of it.²⁹ Joshua, Jephthah, Gideon, Samson, and even Judith who was but a woman, had glorious victories over their enemies in their day; and though their people enjoyed the hard-won peace, they did not share in the heroes' glory. Judas Maccabaeus too was renowned for the many triumphs by which his bravery in battle gained peace for a jubilant people, but were they privileged to participate in his glory? Scripture says there was very great joy, not glory, among the people.³⁰ Now I ask: has the Creator of all things achieved less than these heroes, that he should not be allowed his unique glory? Alone he made all things, alone he conquered the enemy, alone he freed the captives, and then in his glory is he to be saddled with a colleague? "My own arm then was my mainstay."³¹ he said; and again: "I have trodden the wine-press alone. Of the men of my people not one was with me."³² What right have I to share in the triumph if I stood outside the battle? It would be sheer impertinence

25. Is 48:11.

28. Job 7:20.

31. Is 63:5.

26. Jn 14:27.

29. 1 Sam 18:6.

32. Is 63:3.

27. Eph 2:14.

30. 1 Mac 4:58.

on my part to lay claim to glory without victory, or to victory without a fight. But let the mountains bring a message of peace for the people,³³ a message of peace for us rather than glory. To him who alone both fought and conquered is glory reserved. This is how I desire it to be: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to men of good-will."³⁴ But an evil will rather than a good one characterizes the man who refuses to be content with peace, whose haughty looks and proud heart³⁵ are bent on grasping at the glory that is God's. He is therefore ever devoid of peace, never within reach of glory.

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

6. If I discern in the saints something that is worthy of praise and admiration, and proceed to examine it in the clear light of truth, I become aware that what makes them appear praiseworthy and admirable really belongs to another, and I praise God in his saints.³⁶ Both Elisha³⁷ and the great Elijah³⁸ raised the dead to life, but not by any power of their own. They were the ministers of a power that became manifest to us in these new and wonderful deeds, the power of God who lived in them.³⁹ By his own nature invisible and inaccessible,⁴⁰ he becomes somehow visible and a source of wonder in the lives of those who love him. But he alone is worthy of admiration, for he alone performs the marvels that merit it.⁴¹ We do not praise the pen or the brush when we judge a script or painting, nor do we attribute fame for eloquence to the lips and tongue of the orator. Listen for a moment to the Prophet: "Does the axe

33. Ps 71:3.

36. Ps 150:1.

39. Jn 14:10.

34. Lk 2:14.

37. 2 Kings 4:18-37.

40. 1 Tim 6:16.

35. Ps 100:5.

38. 1 Kings 17:17-24.

41. Ps 71:18.

claim more credit than the man who wields it, or the saw more strength than the man who handles it? It would be like the cudgel controlling the man who raises it, or the club moving what is not made of wood!"⁴² Thus everybody who boasts is against the Lord unless his boasting is in the Lord.⁴³ If I am to boast, then I learn from Paul why and in what: "Our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience."⁴⁴

VI. I may boast securely if my conscience tells me that I in no way detract from the glory of my Creator, because I shall be speaking in the Lord rather than against him. Not only are we not forbidden to boast in this fashion, we are even encouraged by the words: "You seek glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God."⁴⁵ This ability to glory in God alone can come solely from God. Nor is this glory a small thing; it is as real as the truth which is its object, and is a truth so rare, that only an exceptional few even of the perfect can glory in perfectly possessing it. Off with them then, those men who are but a breath, men who are but a delusion; let them deceive each other in their vanity.⁴⁶ For the man who makes a wise boast will put his work to the test,⁴⁷ he will carefully scrutinize it in the light of the truth, and then his reason for boasting will be in himself and not in the patronage of his neighbor. I am but a fool if I entrust my reputation to the casket of your lips, and then begin to beg it of you when I feel the need for it. Am I not simply putting myself in your power, to be praised or blamed as you please? But I am determined to be responsible for myself, I shall be loyal in my own regard. And yet not entirely to myself; rather have I put my trust in him who can take care of all that I have committed to him until that Day.⁴⁸ It is safe in his hands, it will be given back in full. Then all those who set no store by the praise of men will receive the sure praise of God.⁴⁹ For those whose glory is in earthly loves will find confusion

42. Is 10:15.

45. Jn 5:44.

48. 2 Tim 1:12.

43. 2 Cor 10:17.

46. Ps 61:10.

49. 1 Cor 4:5.

44. 2 Cor 1:12.

47. Gal 6:4.

at the end,⁵⁰ even as David said: "Those who please men are confounded, because God has rejected them."⁵¹

VII. 7. Dear brothers, if you can grasp these truths none of you will hanker after praise in this life, because if you win any favor here below and fail to thank God for it, you are defrauding him. How is it possible for you to glory, you who are but stinking dust? Will you dare glory in holiness of life? But it is the Spirit who makes holy, that Spirit who is God's, not yours. Even if you are resplendent with prodigies and miracles it is still God's power working through your hands. Or have you made an elegant speech that wins the plaudits of the crowd? But it is Christ who has given you the eloquence and wisdom.⁵² For what is your tongue but the pen of a writer?⁵³ And it is yours only on loan,⁵⁴ a talent committed to you, to be demanded again with interest.⁵⁵ If you work willingly and persevere in producing results, you will receive the reward of your labor.⁵⁶ If you do otherwise your talent will be taken from you, but the interest will still be demanded, and you will suffer the fate of a dishonest and lazy workman. All praise, therefore, for the manifold gifts of grace with which you are endowed,⁵⁷ must be given to him who is the author and giver of all that is praiseworthy. Make sure your thanks are not the pious cant of the hypocrite, nor the empty gesture of the worldling, nor yet the constraint imposed on beasts of burden; but, as one has a right to expect of dedicated men,⁵⁸ let it be full of confident sincerity, of meaningful devotion and of becoming, well-regulated cheerfulness. Therefore, while offering up the sacrifice of praise⁵⁹ and fulfilling our vows from day to day,⁶⁰ let us make every endeavor to put meaning into our observance, to fill the meaning with love, our love with joy and our joy with realism; let that realism be tempered with humility and our humility be buoyant with liberty. Then we shall advance toward our goal with the untrammelled passions of a purified mind. We may

50. Phil 3:19.

53. Ps 44:2.

56. 1 Cor 3:8.

59. Ps 115:17.

51. Ps 52:6.

54. 2 Kings 6:5.

57. 1 Pet 4:10.

60. Ps 60:9.

52. Lk 21:15.

55. Mt 25:14-30.

58. Eph 5:3.

even find ourselves at times living beyond our normal powers through the great intensity of our affections and our spiritual joy, in jubilant encounters, in the light of God, in sweetness, in the Holy Spirit,⁶¹ all showing that we are among those envisioned by the Prophet when he said: "Lord, they will walk in the light of your favor; they will rejoice in your name all day and exult in your righteousness."⁶²

VIII. 8. But perchance one of you will say to me: "What you say is good, but your words ought to be relevant to your theme." Just wait a little while; I am not unmindful. Have I not undertaken to expound that text: "Your name is oil poured out"?⁶³ This is my set task, at this I must toil. Whether what I have so far said is necessary you will see; my purpose now is to explain to you briefly that it is not irrelevant. Do you not remember that the last commendation of the breasts of the bride concerned the sweet smell of the ointments?⁶⁴ Is it not becoming then that the bride should acknowledge this fragrance to be the Bridegroom's gift rather than claim it as her own? It is along these lines that all I have hitherto said must be understood. "If my breasts exhale this sweet perfume," she says, "if they are so attractive, it is not because of any art or merit of mine, O my Bridegroom, but because of your generosity, because the oil of your name has been poured out." So much for the relevance of my text.

9. Finally, the explanation of the little verse that has been the occasion of this prolonged sermon on the abominable vice of ingratitude, must wait for another time and another sermon. Now it suffices to remind you that if the bride would not in the least dare to attribute to herself any virtue or any grace, how much less should we, who are mere youths? Let us therefore imitate this attitude of the bride and say: "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory."⁶⁵ Let us assert this not merely in word and in speech but in deed and in truth⁶⁶ lest something that I fear very much may

61. 2 Cor 6:6.

64. Sermon 9:6.

62. Ps 88:16-17.

65. Ps 113:9.

63. Song 1:2.

66. 1 Jn 3:18.

be said even of us: "But though they outwardly loved him and used their tongues to lie to him, in their hearts they were not true to him, they were unfaithful to his covenant."⁶⁷ Let us cry out therefore with a voice that comes more from the heart than from the lips: "Save us, O Lord, our God, and gather us from among the pagans, that we may praise your holy name rather than our own, and find our happiness in praising you instead of ourselves, for ever and ever."⁶⁸

67. Ps 77:36-37.

68. Ps 105:47.

SERMON 14

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AND THE JEWS

“**G**OD IS RENOWNED IN JUDAH, his name is great in Israel.”¹ The pagan people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,² a light that shone in Judah and Israel, and filled them with longing to draw near and be enlightened.³ Those who once were not a people at all would now be formed into a people,⁴ and the two, converging like walls, would be joined as one by the one corner-stone.⁵ This union’s fruit is peace.⁶ For confidence was imparted in the very utterance of the invitation already proclaimed: “Rejoice, pagans, with his people.”⁷ Hence their desire to draw near; but the synagogue stood in their way, insisting that a church gathered from among the pagans would be both unclean and unworthy, taunting them as idolaters of the lowest type, blinded by the darkness of ignorance. “By what right do you come here?” the Jews challenged. “Do not touch me.”⁸ “Why?” asked the pagans. “Is God the God of the Jews alone and not of the pagans too?”⁹ And though it be true that we have no right, he is not lacking in tender mercy. Surely he is not merely just? He must be merciful too. O Lord, deal with me tenderly and I shall live;¹⁰ your mercies are manifold; give me life according to that justice of yours that can be gentle as mercy itself.”¹¹ What will the just and merciful Lord¹² do when he discovers the Jews boasting

1. Ps 75:2.

4. 1 Pet 2:10.

7. Rom 15:10.

10. Ps 118:77.

2. Is 9:2.

5. Eph 2:20f.

8. Jn 20:17.

11. Ps 118:156.

3. Ps 33:5.

6. Ps 75:3.

9. Rom 3:29.

12. 2 Mac 1:24.

of the law and flattering themselves on their own righteousness, blind to their need for mercy and scorning the pagans who feel that need? The pagans on the other hand, in their consciousness of sin, admit their unworthiness, and implore mercy rather than judgment. What, I ask, will the Judge do, that Judge in whom judgment and mercy are so equally immanent that neither precedes the other? What can be more fitting than that he should deal with each according to their dispositions, judgment for the one, mercy for the other? If the Jew wants judgment, let him have it; and let the pagans give due honor to God for his mercy.¹³ And the judgment is this, that those who despise God's loving righteousness and make self-righteousness their norm, merit censure rather than approval; left to their own righteousness they are fettered, not liberated.

2. The Jews' position is a consequence of the law, which has never led anyone to perfection;¹⁴ it is a burden which neither they nor their ancestors were strong enough to support.¹⁵ But the synagogue is stubborn, and looks with disdain on the easy yoke and the light burden.¹⁶ It is in good health, it has no need of a doctor,¹⁷ of the grace of the Spirit. It puts its trust in the law: let the law give it what freedom it can.¹⁸ But no law has yet been made that could impart life;¹⁹ rather does it kill, for the written letters bring death.²⁰ Hence the words of Christ: "I have told you already, you will die in your sins."²¹ And this, O Synagogue, is the judgment you have demanded. Blind and quarrelsome, you will be abandoned to your error until the whole pagan world that your pride has spurned and your envy obstructed, shall have entered the fold²² and bowed to the God who is renowned in Judah, whose name is great in Israel.²³ It is for judgment that he has come into this world, so that those without sight may see and those with sight turn blind.²⁴ Yet this will not be total blindness, for the Lord will not entirely reject his people,²⁵ but will reserve for himself survivors²⁶ such as the Apostles

13. Rom 15:9.

16. Mt 11:30.

19. Gal 3:21.

22. Rom 11:25.

25. Ps 96:3 (Roman Psalter).

14. Heb 7:19.

17. Lk 5:31.

20. 2 Cor 3:6.

23. Ps 75:2.

15. Acts 15:10.

18. Mt 27:43.

21. Jn 8:24.

24. Jn 9:39.

26. Is 1:9.

and the multitude of believers who in heart and mind are one.²⁷ He will not cast them off for ever,²⁸ a remnant will be saved.²⁹ Mindful of his mercy he will come again to the aid of Israel his servant,³⁰ so that mercy may still accompany judgment even where it finds no occasion for exercise. For if the Jews were dealt with according to their deserts there would be judgment without mercy to those who had not themselves been merciful.³¹

II. Judah possesses in abundance the oil of the knowledge of God, but like a miser keeps it bottled up for his own benefit. Though I intercede with him he shows no compassion, he will not lend.³² For himself alone the worship of God, for himself alone the knowledge of God, the custody of God's great name.³³ Far from being zealous for his own welfare, he is jealous of me.

3. You therefore, since you are my Lord, must take up my cause,³⁴ that your great name may be still more glorious, the jars of oil be multiplied still. Let it increase, let it brim over, let it be poured out and diffused in rivulets among the pagans, that every man may experience the salvation of God.³⁵ Why should the ingrate Jew demand that all the oil of salvation be confined to the beard of Aaron?³⁶ The source of this oil is not the beard but the head, and the head exists not merely for the beard but for the whole body. The downward flow touches first the beard but not exclusively. For all that comes from above is transmitted to the members further down. Let them descend then, these supernal unguents, down upon the breasts of the Church, who with great eagerness does not disdain to wring them from the beard till she is totally bedewed with grace. Nor does she prove ungrateful, for she proclaims: "Your name is oil poured out."³⁷ But let it run still further down till it reaches the very hem of her garment, even me the last of all and the least worthy, yet a part, nevertheless, of that garment. For I, a little one in Christ,³⁸ by the very right of love crave these graces from the

27. Acts 4:32.

30. Lk 1:54.

33. Ps 75:2.

36. Ps 132:2.

28. Ps 43:23.

31. Jas 2:13.

34. Ps 118:154.

37. Song 1:2.

29. Rom 9:27.

32. Ps 36:26.

35. Lk 3:6.

38. 1 Cor 3:1.

Church's maternal breasts. And if some man, roused to envy at the sight of your goodness,³⁹ should grumble at your generosity, you, O Lord, must be my security;⁴⁰ from you let my judgment come,⁴¹ not from the haughty Israel. Indeed you must speak too in your own defence and tell the calumniator—because you are calumniated for bestowing gifts gratuitously—tell him: "I choose to pay the last-comer as much as I pay you."⁴² The Pharisee objects to this. Why does he grumble? My claim rests on the will of the Judge, the most just assessment of merit that there is, and the richest source of reward. Is he not free to act according to his will? The mercy that he bestows on me does not injure you in the slightest. "Take what belongs to you and go."⁴³ If it be his will to save such as I,⁴⁴ what loss is that to you?

4. Over-rate your merits as you please, and boast of your labors—the mercy of the Lord is better than life itself.⁴⁵ I confess that I have not borne the burden of the day and the heat;⁴⁶ it is the will of the Father that my yoke should be easy and my burden light.⁴⁷ I work for scarcely an hour; and if longer, I do not notice it because of love. Let the Jew rely on his own strength; I am free to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do.⁴⁸ This is how I make good what I lose in time and work. The Jew places his trust in the text of a covenant, I in God's good pleasure; nor shall my trust be reputed as folly,⁴⁹ because his will is a spring of life.⁵⁰ That will reconciles the Father to me, restores my inheritance with immense liberality, with music, songs and feasting, with the resounding joys of a whole family in celebration.⁵¹ If that elder brother of mine becomes indignant and chooses to eat a kid outside with his friends rather than the fatted calf in my company in my Father's house, he shall have his answer: "It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is

39. Mt 20:15.

42. Mt 20:14.

45. Ps 62:4.

48. Rom 12:2.

51. Lk 15:25-32.

40. Is 38:14.

43. Mt 20:14f.

46. Mt 20:12.

49. Ps 21:3.

41. Ps 16:2.

44. Esther 13:9.

47. Mt 11:30.

50. Ps 29:6.

found.”⁵² The Jews still make merry outside with their friends the demons, who are pleased to see them swallowing down the insipid kid of their own sinfulness, to see them stowing it away, foolishly concealing it in their sluggish stomach. Meantime they despise the justice of God,⁵³ and with the purpose of substituting their own, declare themselves free of sin,⁵⁴ free of the need to kill the fatted calf, because in their own eyes they are made clean and just by the works of the law. But when the evil of the written letter that brings death⁵⁵ is torn in two at the death of the crucified Word,⁵⁶ the Church, led by the Spirit of liberty, daringly penetrates to his inmost depths, acknowledges and takes delight in him, occupies the place of her rival to become his bride, to enjoy the embraces of his newly-emptied arms. In the fire of her spirit, clinging to the Lord Christ who distils and pours on her whole being the oil of gladness⁵⁷ in a measure not given to her companions, she says: “Your name is oil poured out.”⁵⁸ What wonder if she be anointed, since she embraces him who is the Anointed One?

III. 5. Therefore the Church reclines within, but only the Church of the perfect during the present time. We too, however, have grounds for hope. Imperfect though we be, let us rest outside the doors, rejoicing in hope.⁵⁹ Meantime the bride and Groom are within by themselves, enjoying the mystery of their mutual embraces, safe from the jarring turmoil of carnal desires, from the restless intrusion of sensible images. But the bevy of bridesmaids, who cannot as yet overcome the giddiness of youth, must wait outside. Let them wait with confidence for the fulfillment of those words they have so often read: “The virgins in her train are led into the king, her ladies-in-waiting follow.”⁶⁰ And that each may know of what spirit she is,⁶¹ I mean by virgins those who committed themselves to Christ before they could be stained by sinful love. Persevering steadily in this union, they are all the more happy the

52. Lk 15:32.

55. 2 Cor 3:6.

58. Song 1:2.

61. Lk 9:55.

53. Wis 14:30.

56. Mt 27:51.

59. Rom 12:12.

54. 1 Jn 1:8.

57. Ps 44:8.

60. Ps 44:15.

earlier they made choice of him. Those called ladies-in-waiting, however, are the ones who, once conformed to this world by shamefully prostituting themselves on the full tide of carnal lust to the princes of this world, whose law was lustful desire, are now at last filled with the shame that urges them to rid themselves of that deformity and to hasten to put on the form of the new man with a sincerity all the greater the more late the decision. Both classes make progress, they grow neither weak nor weary, though still far from feeling the urge to exclaim: "Your name is oil poured out." Neither have they the courage to address the Bridegroom directly. Yet if they make the effort to follow more exactly the footsteps of the bride, they will find delight in the odor at least of the overflowing oil, and so be inspired with the desire to strive for more excellent ends.

IV. 6. I am not ashamed to admit that very often I myself, especially in the early days of my conversion, experienced coldness and hardness of heart, while deep in my being I sought for him whom I longed to love.⁶² I could not yet love him since I had not yet really found him; at best my love was less than it should have been, and for that very reason I sought to increase it, for I would not have sought him if I did not already love him in some degree. I sought him therefore that in him my numbed and languid spirit might find warmth and repose, for nowhere could I find a friend to help me, whose love would thaw the wintry cold that chilled my inward being, and bring back again the feeling of spring-like bliss and spiritual delight. But my languor and weariness only increased, my soul melted away for sorrow,⁶³ even to the verge of despair. All I could do was repeat softly to myself: "Who can stand before his cold?"⁶⁴ Then, at times when I least expected, at the word or even the sight of a good and holy man, at the memory of a dead or absent friend, he set his wind blowing and the waters flowing,⁶⁵ and my tears were my food day and night.⁶⁶ How can I explain

62. Song 3:1.

65. Ps 147:18.

63. Ps 118:28.

66. Ps 41:4.

64. Ps 147:17.

this? Only by ascribing it to the odor from the oil that anointed the friend in question. For me there was no anointing, but rather the experience that came by another's mediation. And so, though made happy by this favor, I was also embarrassed and humiliated: it was a mere puff of perfumed air, not the dewy sprinkling for which I longed. Given only the pleasure of its odor and not of its touch, I saw myself as unworthy of him to whom God himself would communicate his sweetest joys. And even now, if a similar experience should happen to me, I eagerly grasp at the proffered gift, I am grateful for it, even though I feel sad beyond words that I have not won it by my own merits, that despite my urgent request it has not passed directly from his hand to mine. I feel ashamed that the remembrance of human goodness should affect me more powerfully than the thought of God. In these straits I cry out with a groan: "When shall I come and behold the face of God?"⁶⁷ Many of you too, I feel, have had similar experiences, and have them even still. In what light then must we view them? I hold that through them our pride is shown up, our humility guarded, brotherly love fostered and good desires aroused. One and the same food is medicine for the sick and nourishment for the convalescent; it gives strength to the weak and pleasure to the strong. One and the same food cures sickness, preserves health, builds up the body, titillates the palate.

V. 7. But let us return to the words of the bride and listen attentively to what she says, that we may learn to relish what she relishes. I have already said that the bride is the Church.⁶⁸ She it is to whom much has been forgiven because she loves much.⁶⁹ Hence, when her rival hurls recriminations at her,⁷⁰ she turns them to her own advantage. Hence too we find her more gentle under correction, more patient under trial; hence the ardor in her love, the wisdom in her decisions, the humility in her self-knowledge, the attractiveness in her modesty; she is prompt to obey, sincere and thoughtful in offering thanks. Finally, while the Jews, as we have said, murmur even when calling to mind their own merits, their

67. Ps 41:3.

68. See above, n. 4.

69. Lk 7:47.

70. 1 Sam 1:6.

endurance through the burden of the day and the heat,⁷¹ the Church remembers only the favor received and says: "Your name is oil poured out."⁷²

8. This is plainly Israel's witness of praise to the name of the Lord,⁷³ not indeed the Israel that lives by the law of the flesh, but he that lives by the law of the Spirit.⁷⁴ For how could the carnal Israel utter such words? It is not that he has no oil, but that it is not poured out. He has it but keeps it hidden; he has it in his Scriptures but not in his heart. In the sight of men he clings to the letter of the law; he clutches in his hand a jar that is full but sealed, nor will he open it and be anointed. It is within you, deep within, that the Spirit's unction is poured out: open and be anointed and you will no longer be a rebellious house.⁷⁵ Why store oil in jars and never apply it to your limbs? Of what use to ponder over your books on the name of our holy Savior if you exclude his love from your lives? You have the oil: pour it out and experience its threefold power. The Jew scorns these monitions but you will listen to them. I wish now to tell you what I have so far left unmentioned: why the name of the Bridegroom is compared to oil. There are three reasons. But because he is called by many names, since that which is adequate to him is known to none—for it is ineffable—we must first invoke the Holy Spirit that he may be pleased to reveal to us that one name above all others on which he wishes us to concentrate in this instance, for he has given no written indication of it. This topic however must wait for another time. For even if I now knew all I should need to know, even if you should not feel oppressed nor I wearied, the hour-glass indicates the end. Hold fast to all that I have drawn to your attention, for tomorrow I shall not repeat it. The job I have undertaken, the task in hand, is to explain why the Bridegroom's name is compared to oil, and what this name is. And since I may not trust in my own powers for what I am to say, prayers must be offered that the Bridegroom himself, Jesus Christ, our Lord, may reveal it to us by his Spirit.⁷⁶ To him all honor and glory for ever and ever.⁷⁷ Amen.

71. Mt 20:12.

72. Song 1:2.

73. Ps 121:4.

74. 1 Cor 10:18.

75. Ezek 2:5.

76. 1 Cor 2:10.

77. Rom 16:27.

SERMON 15

THE NAME OF JESUS

WISDOM IS A KINDLY SPIRIT,¹ and easy of access to those who call upon him. Quite often he anticipates their request and says: "Here I am."² Listen now to what, because of your prayers, he has revealed to me about the subject we postponed yesterday; be ready to gather the ripe fruit of your intercession. I put before you a name that is rightly compared to oil, how rightly I shall explain. You encounter many names for the Bridegroom scattered through the pages of Scripture, but all these I sum up for you in two. I think you will find none that does not express either the gift of his love or the power of his majesty. The Holy Spirit tells us this through the mouth of one of his friends: "Two things I have heard: it is for God to be strong, for you, Lord, to be merciful."³ With reference to his majesty we read: "Holy and terrible is his name;"⁴ with reference to his love: "Of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved."⁵ Further examples make it clearer still. Jeremiah says: "This is the name by which he will be called: 'the Lord our righteous one' "⁶—a name suggesting power; but when Isaiah says: "His name will be called Emmanuel,"⁷ he indicates his love. He himself said: "You call me Master and Lord."⁸ The first title implies love, the second majesty. Love's business is to educate the mind as well as to provide the body's food. Isaiah also said: "His name shall

1. Wis 1:6.

4. Ps 110:9.

7. Is 7:14.

2. Is 58:9; 65:24.

5. Acts 4:12.

8. Jn 13:13.

3. Ps 61:12f.

6. Jer 23:6.

be called Wonderful, Counselor, God, the Mighty One, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”⁹ The first, third and fourth signify majesty, the others love. Which of these therefore is poured out? In some mysterious way the name of majesty and power is transfused into that of love and mercy, an amalgam that is abundantly poured out in the person of our Savior Jesus Christ.¹⁰ The name “God” liquefies and dissolves into the title “God with us,” that is, into “Emmanuel.” He who is “Wonderful” becomes “Counselor”; “God” and “the Mighty One” become the “Everlasting Father” and the “Prince of Peace.” “The Lord our righteous one” becomes the “gracious and merciful Lord.”¹¹ This process is not new: in ancient times “Abram” became “Abraham”¹² and “Sarai” became “Sara”;¹³ and we are reminded that in these events the mystery of the communication of salvation was pre-figured and celebrated.

2. So I ask where now is that warning cry: “I am the Lord, I am the Lord,”¹⁴ that resounded with recurring terror in the ears of the people of old? The prayer with which I am familiar, that begins with the sweet name of Father,¹⁵ gives me confidence of obtaining the petitions with which it continues. Servants are called friends in this new way,¹⁶ and the resurrection is proclaimed not to mere disciples but to brothers.¹⁷

II. Nor am I surprised if, when the time has fully come,¹⁸ there is an outpouring of Jesus’ name as God fulfills what he had promised through Joel,¹⁹ an outpouring of his Spirit on all mankind, since I read that a similar event took place among the Hebrews in former times.²⁰ But I feel that your thoughts fly ahead of my words, that you already guess what I intend to say. How is it, I ask, that God’s first answer to Moses’ question was: “I Am Who I Am,” and “I Am has sent me to you”?²¹ I doubt if even Moses himself would have grasped its import if it had not been poured out. But it was

9. Is 9:6.

12. Gen 17:5.

15. Mt 6:9.

18. Gal 4:4.

21. Ex 3:14.

10. Tit 3:6.

13. Gen 17:15.

16. Jn 15:14.

19. Joel 2:28.

11. Ps 110:4.

14. Ex 20:2, 5.

17. Mt 28:10.

20. Num 11:26 et al.

poured and he understood it; and not only poured but poured out, for an inward pouring had already occurred: the citizens of heaven already possessed it, the angels knew it. Now it is sent abroad, and what was infused into the angels as an intimate secret was poured out upon men, so that henceforth they could justly proclaim from the earth: "Your name is oil poured out,"²² if the obstinacy of a thankless people did not prevent it. For he had said: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."²³

3. Run then, O pagans, salvation is at hand, that name is poured out which saves all who invoke it.²⁴ The God of the angels calls himself the God of men. He poured out oil on Jacob and it fell on Israel.²⁵ Say to your brothers: "Give us some of your oil."²⁶ If they refuse, ask the Lord of the oil to give it to you. Say to him: "Take away our reproach."²⁷

See that no envious tongue insults your beloved, whom it has pleased you to call from the ends of the earth with a compassion all the greater for her unworthiness. Is it fitting, I ask, that a wicked servant should shut out the invited guests of the master of the house? You have said: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."²⁸ Of no more than these? Pour out, continue to pour; open your hand still wider and satisfy the desire of everything that lives.²⁹

Let them come from the east and the west and take their places with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.³⁰ Let them come, let the tribes come up, the tribes of the Lord, to praise his name according to his command to Israel.³¹ Let them come and take their place, let them feast and be filled with gladness,³² let the banqueters sing as one man the resounding song of exultation and praise:³³ "Your name is oil poured out."³⁴ One thing I know: if we find that the porters are Andrew and Philip,³⁵ we shall not be repulsed when we ask for oil, when we desire to see Jesus.³⁶ Philip

22. Song 1:2.

25. Is 9:8.

28. Ex 3:6.

31. Ps 121:4.

34. Song 1:2.

23. Ex 3:6.

26. Mt 25:8.

29. Ps 144:16.

32. Ps 67:4.

35. Jn 12:20ff.

24. Acts 2:21.

27. Is 4:1.

30. Mt 8:11.

33. Ps 41:5.

36. Jn 12:21f.

will at once tell Andrew, and Andrew and Philip will tell Jesus. And what will Jesus say? Precisely because he is Jesus he will tell them: "Unless a wheat-grain falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest."³⁷ Let the grain die therefore, and let the harvest of the pagans spring to fruition. It is necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and that penance and forgiveness of sin should be preached in his name,³⁸ not alone in Judaea but even among all nations, because from the sole name of Christ thousands upon thousands of believers are called Christians, whose hearts all re-echo: "Your name is oil poured out."

4. I recognize now the name hinted at by Isaiah: "My servants are to be given a new name. Whoever is blessed on earth in that name will be blessed by the Lord, Amen."³⁹ O blessed name, oil poured out without limit! From heaven it pours down on Judaea and from there over all the earth, so that round the whole world the Church proclaims: "Your name is oil poured out." And what an outpouring! It not only bathes the heavens and the earth, it even bedews the underworld, so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld should bend the knee in the name of Jesus, and that every tongue should acclaim:⁴⁰ "Your name is oil poured out." Take the name Christ, take the name Jesus; both were infused into the angels, both were poured out upon men, even upon men who rotted like animals in their own dung.⁴¹ Thus you became a savior both of men and beasts, so countless are your mercies, O God.⁴² How precious your name, and yet how cheap! Cheap, but the instrument of salvation. If it were not cheap it would not have been poured out for me; if it lacked saving power it would not have won me. Made a sharer in the name, I share too in its inheritance. For I am a Christian, Christ's own brother. If I am what I say, I am the heir of God, co-heir with Christ.⁴³ And what wonder if the name of the Bridegroom is poured out, since he himself is poured out? For he emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave.⁴⁴

37. Jn 12:24.

40. Phil 2:10f.

43. Rom 8:17.

38. Lk 24:46f.

41. Joel 1:17.

44. Phil 2:7.

39. Is 65:15f.

42. Ps 35:8.

Did he not even say: "I am poured out like water"?⁴⁵ The fullness of the divine life was poured out and lived on earth in bodily form,⁴⁶ that all of us who live in this body doomed to death⁴⁷ may receive from that fullness,⁴⁸ and being filled with its life-giving odor say: "Your name is oil poured out." Such is what is meant by the outpouring of the name, such its manner, such its extent.

III. 5. But why the symbol of oil? I have yet to explain this. In the previous sermon I had begun to do so when another matter that seemed to demand mention suddenly presented itself,⁴⁹ though I may have dallied with it longer than I intended. In this I resembled the valiant woman, Wisdom, who put her hand to the distaff, her fingers to the spindle.⁵⁰ Skilfully she produced from her scanty stock of wool or flax a long spool of thread, out of which she wove the material that made warm clothes for the members of her household. The likeness between oil and the name of the Bridegroom is beyond doubt, the Holy Spirit's comparison of the two is no arbitrary gesture. Unless you can persuade me otherwise, I hold that the likeness is to be found in the threefold property of oil: it gives light, it nourishes, it anoints. It feeds the flame, it nourishes the body, it relieves pain: it is light, food, medicine. And is not this true too of the Bridegroom's name? When preached it gives light, when meditated it nourishes, when invoked it relieves and soothes. Let us consider each point.

6. How shall we explain the world-wide light of faith, swift and flaming in its progress, except by the preaching of Jesus' name? Is it not by the light of this name that God has called us into his wonderful light,⁵¹ that irradiates our darkness and empowers us to see the light?⁵² To such as we Paul says: "You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord."⁵³ This is the name that Paul was commanded to present before kings and pagans and the people of Israel;⁵⁴ a name that illumined his native land as he carried it with

45. Ps 21:15.

48. Jn 1:16.

51. 1 Pet 2:9.

54. Acts 9:15.

46. Col 2:9.

49. Sermon 14:8.

52. Ps 35:10.

47. Rom 7:24.

50. Prov 31:10-21.

53. Eph 5:8.

him like a torch, preaching on all his journeys that the night is almost over, it will be daylight soon—let us give up all the things we prefer to do under cover of the dark; let us arm ourselves and appear in the light. Let us live decently as people do in the day-time.⁵⁵ To every eye he was a lamp on its lamp-stand;⁵⁶ to every place he brought the good news of Jesus, and him crucified.⁵⁷ What a splendor radiated from that light, dazzling the eyes of the crowd, when Peter uttered the name that strengthened the feet and ankles of the cripple, and gave light to many eyes that were spiritually blind!⁵⁸ Did not the words shoot like a flame when he said: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk”?⁵⁹ But the name of Jesus is more than light, it is also food. Do you not feel increase of strength as often as you remember it? What other name can so enrich the man who meditates? What can equal its power to refresh the harassed senses, to buttress the virtues, to add vigor to good and upright habits, to foster chaste affections? Every food of the mind is dry if it is not dipped in that oil; it is tasteless if not seasoned by that salt. Write what you will, I shall not relish it unless it tells of Jesus. Talk or argue about what you will, I shall not relish it if you exclude the name of Jesus. Jesus to me is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, a song in the heart.

IV. Again, it is a medicine. Does one of us feel sad?⁶⁰ Let the name of Jesus come into his heart, from there let it spring to his mouth, so that shining like the dawn it may dispel all darkness and make a cloudless sky. Does someone fall into sin? Does his despair even urge him to suicide? Let him but invoke this life-giving name and his will to live will be at once renewed. The hardness of heart that is our common experience, the apathy bred of indolence, bitterness of mind, repugnance for the things of the spirit—have they ever failed to yield in presence of that saving name? The tears dammed up by the barrier of our pride—how have they not burst forth again with sweeter abundance at the thought of Jesus’ name?

55. Rom 13:12f.

58. Acts 3:6f.

56. Mt 5:15.

59. Acts 3:6.

57. 1 Cor 2:2.

60. Jas 5:13.

And where is the man, who, terrified and trembling before impending peril, has not been suddenly filled with courage and rid of fear by calling on the strength of that name? Where is the man who, tossed on the rolling seas of doubt, did not quickly find certitude by recourse to the clarity of Jesus' name? Was ever a man so discouraged, so beaten down by afflictions, to whom the sound of this name did not bring new resolve? In short, for all the ills and disorders to which flesh is heir, this name is medicine. For proof we have no less than his own promise: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."⁶¹ Nothing so curbs the onset of anger, so allays the upsurge of pride. It cures the wound of envy, controls unbridled extravagance and quenches the flame of lust; it cools the thirst of covetousness and banishes the itch of unclean desire. For when I name Jesus I set before me a man who is meek and humble of heart,⁶² kind, prudent, chaste, merciful,⁶³ flawlessly upright and holy in the eyes of all; and this same man is the all-powerful God whose way of life heals me, whose support is my strength. All these re-echo for me at the hearing of Jesus' name. Because he is man I strive to imitate him; because of his divine power I lean upon him. The examples of his human life I gather like medicinal herbs; with the aid of his power I blend them, and the result is a compound like no pharmacist can produce.

7. Hidden as in a vase, in this name of Jesus, you, my soul, possess a salutary remedy against which no spiritual illness will be proof. Carry it always close to your heart, always in your hand, and so ensure that all your affections, all your actions, are directed to Jesus. You are even invited to do this: "Set me as a seal," he says, "upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm."⁶⁴ Here is a theme we shall treat of again. For the moment you have this ready medicine for heart and hand. The name of Jesus furnishes the power to correct your evil actions, to supply what is wanting to imperfect ones; in this name your affections find a guard against corruption, or if corrupted, a power that will make them whole again.

61. Ps 49:15.

63. Tit 1:8.

62. Mt 11:29.

64. Song 8:6.

V. 8. Judaea too has had her Jesus—Messiahs in whose empty names she glories. For they give neither light nor food nor medicine. Hence the Synagogue is in the darkness still,⁶⁵ enduring the pangs of hunger and disease, and she will neither be healed nor have her fill until she discovers that my Jesus rules over Jacob to the ends of the earth, until she comes back in the evening, hungering like a dog and prowling about the city.⁶⁶ True, they were sent on in advance, like the staff preceding the Prophet to where the child lay dead,⁶⁷ but they could not see a meaning in their own names because no meaning was there. The staff was laid upon the corpse but produced neither voice nor movement since it was a mere staff. Then he who sent the staff came down and quickly saved his people from their sins,⁶⁸ proving that men spoke truly of him when they said: "Who is this man that he even forgives sins?"⁶⁹ He is no other than the one who says: "I am the salvation of my people."⁷⁰ Now the Word is heard, now it is experienced, and it is clear that, unlike the others, he bears no empty name. As men feel the infusion of spiritual health they refuse to conceal their good fortune. The inward experience finds outward expression. Stricken with remorse I speak out his praise, and praise is a sign of life: "For from the dead, as from one who does not exist, praise has ceased."⁷¹ But see! I am conscious, I am alive! I am perfectly restored, my resurrection is complete. What else is the death of the body than to be deprived of life and feeling? Sin, which is the death of the soul, took from me the feeling of compunction, hushed my prayers of praise; I was dead. Then he who forgives sin came down,⁷² restored my senses again and said: "I am your deliverer."⁷³ Why wonder that death should yield when he who is life comes down? "For a man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved."⁷⁴ The child who was dead is now yawning,⁷⁵ he yawns seven times as if

65. 1 Jn 2:9.

66. Ps 58:14f.

67. The Prophet here is Elisha. 2 Kings 4:29-31.

68. Mt 1:21.

69. Lk 7:49.

70. Ps 34:3.

71. Sir 17:26.

72. Lk 7:49.

73. Ps 34:3.

74. Rom 10:10.

75. 2 Kings 4:35.

to say: "Seven times daily I praise you, Lord."⁷⁶ Take note of this number seven. It is not a meaningless number, it bears a sacred significance. But because you are by now sated, we should do well to hold this theme over for another sermon, and come with whetted appetites to a table newly laden, to which we are invited by the Church's Spouse, our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen.⁷⁷

76. Ps 118:164.

77. Rom 9:5.

SERMON 16

THE MEANING OF THE NUMBER SEVEN AND THE QUALITIES OF TRUE CONFESSION

WHAT THEN DOES THAT NUMBER seven mean? I wonder if anyone among us is so ingenuous as to think that those yawnings of the boy were devoid of import, their number fortuitous. I for one do not consider the Prophet's actions meaningless when he stretched himself on top of the child, putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes to his eyes, and his hands on his hands.¹ These deeds were done and described under the Holy Spirit's guidance chiefly for the instruction of people who have succumbed to their own corrupt passions, who have been taught to play the fool by the wisdom of this world. "For a perishable body presses down the soul, and this tent of clay weighs down the teeming mind."² So no one should be surprised or annoyed if I spend some time in minute scrutiny of these matters, for in them the Holy Spirit has stored his treasures; I know that by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit.³ And I must warn those present whose agile minds outstrip my thoughts, and in every sermon anticipate the end almost before they have grasped the beginning, that I am obliged to adapt myself primarily to minds that are less keen. But my purpose is not so much to explain words as to move hearts. I must both draw the water and offer it as a drink, a work that I shall not accomplish by a spate of rapid comments but by careful examination and frequent

1. 2 Kings 4:34.

2. Wis 9:15.

3. Is 38:16.

exhortation. I had indeed hoped that the discussion of the mystical sense of our text would not have detained us so long. I actually thought that one sermon would suffice, and that passing quickly through that shadowy wood where allegories lurk unseen, we should arrive, after perhaps one day's journey,⁴ on the open plain of moral truths. We did not succeed. We have already been two days travelling and the end has yet to be reached. Looking into the distance a man can see the tops of trees and the mountain peaks; but his eye cannot range over the great glens beneath them, nor pierce the pathless thickets. For example, was it possible for me to have foreseen a reference to Elisha's miracle,⁵ that suddenly sprang to my mind as I discussed the call of the pagans and the rejection of the Jews? And now that we have come upon it we must linger over it for a while, and later return to what we have left aside, for that too is food for our souls. Hunters and hounds sometimes abandon the quarry they have raised, and pursue another unexpectedly encountered.

II. 2. It adds strength to my confidence to think that the great Prophet, mighty in work and word,⁶ came down from heaven's high mountain to visit me who am but dust and ashes,⁷ pitying me in my spiritual death, stretching himself upon me as I lay prone, diminishing his stature to be equal to my littleness, sharing with my blindness the light of his own eyes, freeing my dumbness with the kiss of his mouth, and bracing my weak hands with the touch of his own. To linger amid these truths is my delight; my heart is enlarged, my whole inward being is enriched,⁸ my very bones vibrate with praise.⁹ He performed this work once for the human race as a whole, but daily each one of us may experience it in ourselves, when the light of understanding floods our heart, when helpful words grace our speech, when good deeds flow from our hands. By his grace we can think what is true, we can express it to advantage, we can live it with efficacy. Here you are provided with

4. Jon 3:4.

7. Gen 18:27.

5. 2 Kings 4:35.

8. Job 21:24.

6. Lk 24:19.

9. Is 66:14.

a durable three-ply cord¹⁰ for drawing souls out of the devil's prison, and towing them after you into the kingdom of heaven; if you think rightly, if you speak worthily, and if you confirm what you say by your life. Covering my eyes with his own he adorned my interior faculties with the twin lights of faith and understanding. Joining his mouth to this dead mouth of mine, he gave the kiss of peace, for while we were yet sinners and dead to righteousness, he reconciled us to God.¹¹ Setting his mouth to mine he breathed into it a second time the breath of life,¹² but this time a holier life; for at first he created me a living being, then re-made me a life-giving spirit.¹³ As he placed his hands on mine I was imbued with the power of doing good,¹⁴ with the grace of obedience. He certainly showed how strong his hands can be,¹⁵ that he might train my hands for war and my fingers for battle.¹⁶

III. 3. The child yawned seven times.¹⁷ One yawn would have sufficed to manifest the extraordinary miracle, but this multiplicity allied to the eminent character of the number seven, warns us of mystery. First of all, if you regard the whole human race as one huge dead corpse, you may see in every land the Church springing up in the life received from the recumbent body of the prophet and opening her mouth seven times to perform her seven-fold daily praise.¹⁸ Then, turning your gaze on yourself, you will know that you live a spiritual life and satisfy the demands of this mystical number if you control your five senses by the twofold law of charity; if, as the Apostle says, you put your bodies at the service of righteousness for your sanctification, as once you put them at the service of vice and immorality;¹⁹ or again, if while putting these five senses to work for your neighbor's salvation, you complete the number seven by these two, praise of the mercy and of the justice of God.²⁰

4. But I have still another interpretation for these seven yawnings;

10. Eccles 4:12.

11. Rom 5:10.

12. Gen. 2:7.

13. 1 Cor 15:45.

14. Tit 2:7.

15. Prov 31:19.

16. Ps 143:1.

17. 2 Kings 4:35.

18. Ps 118:164. See RB 16:1.

19. Rom 6:19.

20. Ps 100:1.

they are seven experiences without which a man cannot be sure that the renewal of his spiritual life is true and efficacious. Four pertain to the feeling of sorrow for sin, three to oral confession. If you are alive, if you can speak and feel, you must be aware of these experiences in yourself. For you will know that you have fully regained your power of awareness if you perceive your conscience to be stung by a fourfold compunction, by two kinds of shame and by two kinds of fear. Later on I shall speak of the three kinds of confession that raise our lives to the perfection implied by the number seven. Did not Jeremiah, for instance, produce four lamentations?²¹

IV. You too should follow this Prophet's example in lamenting your own sins. Think of God as your creator,²² think of him as your benefactor, your father, your lord. You have sinned against each of these titles to your loyalty, be sorry for them one by one. The first and last should arouse your fear, the second and third your shame. One is not afraid of the Father, because he is a father. A father's instinctive attitude is to spare and to be merciful. And if he does strike it is with a light rod, not with a heavy staff; and when he strikes he heals.²³ It is the Father's voice that says: "When I have struck it is I who heal."²⁴ There is no reason to be afraid of a father, for although there are times when he does use the rod, it is always to correct, never for revenge. To think that I have offended the Father certainly gives ground for shame, but not for fear. Not by the impulse of carnal intercourse, as by my earthly father, was I begotten, but by God's will, by his word of truth.²⁵ And for me thus begotten he did not spare his only-begotten Son.²⁶ He revealed himself to me as a true father, but I did not respond in turn as a son. With what effrontery then do I, bad son that I have been, dare look on the face of so good a father? I am filled with shame for conduct so unworthy of my lineage, ashamed of my ignoble life in presence of so great a father. Dissolve in streams of tears, O eyes of mine;²⁷

21. Jeremiah's authorship is doubtful. See JB, p. 1128.

22. Deut 32:15.

23. Prov 23:14.

24. Deut 32:39.

25. Jas 1:18.

26. Rom 8:32.

27. Ps 118:136.

let blushes suffuse my cheeks, shame cover them like a cloud.²⁸ Let my life be worn out with sorrow, my years with sighs.²⁹ O shame! What harvest have I gathered from deeds that now humiliate me?³⁰ If I have sown in the flesh, from the flesh I shall reap only corruption;³¹ if in the world—both it and its lusts pass away.³² Unhappy madman that I was, I did not blush to prefer things perishable and vain, mere dreams, things destined to be lost,³³ to the love and honor of my eternal Father. I am confounded, doubly confounded to hear him say: “If I am a Father, where is my honor?”³⁴

5. But as well as being my Father, he has overwhelmed me with favors, countless favors that repeatedly bear witness against me:³⁵ the daily nourishment of my body, the prolonged gift of time, and above all the blood of his beloved Son that cries out to him from the earth.³⁶ I blush for my ingratitude. To add to my confusion I stand convicted of returning evil for good and hatred for love.³⁷ But I need fear my benefactor no more than I need fear my Father. For he is a genuine benefactor who showers down his gifts abundantly and never reproaches.³⁸ There is no reproach on account of the gifts, because they are gifts; and his favors were bestowed upon me, not sold. And finally, these gifts are irrevocable.³⁹ But the more I appreciate his kindness, the more I am compelled to recognize my unworthiness. Be ashamed and grieve, O my soul, for though it becomes him not to utter reproaches nor revoke his gifts, it is entirely unbecoming for us to remain ungrateful and forgetful. Alas! even now what return shall I make to him for all his goodness to me?⁴⁰

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

V. Forget for a while the loving titles of Benefactor and Father, and turn to names of harsher import. Read that he who is the

28. Ps 68:8.

31. Gal 6:8.

34. Mal 1:6.

37. Ps 108:5.

40. Ps 115:12.

29. Ps 30:11.

32. 1 Jn 2:17.

35. Job 10:17.

38. Jas 1:5.

30. Rom 6:21.

33. Phil 3:19.

36. Gen 4:10.

39. Rom 11:29.

Father of mercies and God of all comfort,⁴¹ is also the Lord God of revenge,⁴² God the judge, righteous and strong,⁴³ terrible in his deeds among men,⁴⁴ a jealous God.⁴⁵ For you he is Father and Benefactor, for himself he is Lord and Creator, since as Scripture says: "The Lord has made everything for himself."⁴⁶ If therefore he defends and preserves for you what is yours, will he not ultimately be concerned too for what is his? Will he not demand the honor due to his authority? That is why the wicked man has angered God; he said in his heart: "He will not demand it."⁴⁷ And what does he mean by saying in his heart: "He will not demand it," except that he has no fear that he will demand it? But he will demand it to the last farthing,⁴⁸ and repay the arrogant with interest.⁴⁹ He will expect allegiance from the man he has redeemed, honor and worship from the creature he has made.

7. So then, the Father dissembles, the Benefactor forgives, but not so the Lord and Creator; he who will spare a son will not spare an imposter, a wicked servant. Consider how dreadful it is, how terrifying, to have despised your Creator, the Maker of all things, to have offended so majestic a Lord. Majesty and sovereignty inspire fear, especially the majesty and sovereignty of God. If human laws impose the death penalty on one guilty of treason against the head of the State, what will be the fate of those who spurn God's omnipotence? He touches the mountains and they belch forth smoke,⁵⁰ and will a pinch of common dust, that a casual breeze can scatter forever, dare provoke his awe-inspiring majesty? He surely is to be feared who, after he has killed the body, has the power to cast into hell.⁵¹ I dread the thought of hell, I dread the face of the Judge in whose presence even the angels are filled with fear. Terror unnerves me at the thought of the Almighty's anger,⁵² the fury in his countenance, the crash of a world tumbling to ruin, the immense fires and uncontrollable storm,⁵³ and above it all the

41. 2 Cor 1:3.

44. Ps 65:5.

47. Ps 9:34 (13).

50. Ps 143:5.

53. Ps 49:3.

42. Ps 93:1.

45. Ex 20:5.

48. Mt 5:26.

51. Lk 12:5.

43. Ps 7:12.

46. Prov 16:4.

49. Ps 30:24.

52. Is 51:13.

Archangel's menacing trumpet, and the voice of him who destroys.⁵⁴ I am terrified of the fangs of the monster of hell, the pit that swallows up sinners,⁵⁵ where demons roar as they devour.⁵⁶ I recoil in horror from the gnawing worm, the rolling fires, the smoke and sulphurous mist,⁵⁷ the whirling storms;⁵⁸ I recoil from the encroaching vastness of the dark.⁵⁹ Who will turn my head into a fountain, and my eyes into a spring of tears,⁶⁰ that I may forestall that weeping and gnashing of teeth, the unyielding shackles on hands and feet, the heavy bonds that oppress, that strangle, that burn and never consume. Why, O mother, did you bring to birth a son destined for sorrow, the prey of bitterness, the object of God's indignation, doomed to remorse without end?⁶¹ Why did you take upon your knees, why did you feed at your breasts⁶² a child who was born to be fuel for the fire?⁶³

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

VI. The three which remain are found in oral confession, a sign that he may no longer be described as devoid of voice and sensibility, provided that the confession proceeds from a humble, guileless and trusting heart. These conditions will be fulfilled if he confesses all that pricks his conscience with humility, sincerity and trust. There are people who find their joy in doing wrong, and their delight in deceitfulness,⁶⁴ of whom the Prophet says: "They proclaim their sin like Sodom."⁶⁵ But of these there is no question in the present discourse, they are like the lay-folk outside our enclosure with whom we have nothing to do.⁶⁶

9. However, we do sometimes hear men who have committed themselves to religious life and wear the religious habit, shamelessly boasting as they recall their past misdeeds: the duels they fought,

54. Ps 90:3.

57. Joel 2:30.

60. Jer 9:1.

63. Is 9:5.

66. 1 Cor 5:12.

55. Jon 2:3.

58. Ps 148:8.

61. Jer 15:10.

64. Prov 2:14.

56. Sir 51:4.

59. Mt 8:12.

62. Job 3:12.

65. Is 3:9.

their cunning in literary debate or other kinds of vain display that worldlings cherish, behavior of its nature pernicious and injurious, so opposed to spiritual well-being. These are signs of a mind still worldly, and the humble habit worn by religious of this kind serves but as a cloak for their old sinfulness rather than as proof of their renewal in holiness. Some recount past vices as though to express sorrow and repentance for them, but their minds thrill with a secret pleasure, they delude themselves rather than purge their sins; but God is not mocked.⁶⁷ Without putting off the old nature they have pretended to put on the new.⁶⁸ The old yeast is not extruded and cast out by such a confession,⁶⁹ it is simply fixed in its place. In the Psalmist's words: "My bones grew old while I cried out all day long."⁷⁰ I am ashamed when I recall the audacity of monks who were utterly without shame in boasting of things they should have bewailed in sack-cloth; about how, even after receiving the holy habit, they craftily outwitted their neighbor, how they cheated a brother in a business deal,⁷¹ how they recklessly retaliated on those who insulted or reproached them, returning evil for evil, a curse for a curse.⁷²

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

67. Gal 6:7.

70. Ps 31:3.

68. Col 3:9.

71. 1 Thess 4:6.

69. 1 Cor 5:7.

72. 1 Pet 3:9.

fessed his sin when reprimanded by Samuel?⁷³ Surely it was a sinful confession since it did not wash away his guilt. For when did the Master of humility, who by his very nature is inclined to give grace to the humble,⁷⁴ ever scorn a humble confession? It is impossible for him not to be appeased if the humility professed in words finds its source in the heart. For these reasons I have said confession should be humble.

VII. 11. It must also be guileless. If you are guilty beware of the device of excusing your intention, a thing that is hidden from men's eyes; and do not make light of a fault that is grave; nor ascribe it to another person's influence, since no one is compelled to do what his will disapproves. The first of these maneuvers is not a confession but a defense; instead of placating, it provokes. The second reveals ingratitude; the more one lessens the fault the more one diminishes the glory of him who forgives it. A favor is bestowed less willingly when it is felt that the recipient will offer but a paltry thanks for what he deems unnecessary. One who devalues the gift is liable to forfeit the pardon that he needs; and the person who, in confession, attempts to minimize his guilt, finds himself in that situation. The example of Adam warns us about the third ruse: he did not deny his guilt, yet he failed to obtain pardon, doubtless because he would make Eve a sharer in his guilt.⁷⁵ To involve another in the crime of which you are accused is a form of excuse. The prophet David teaches that this desire to excuse oneself when reprehended, is not merely fruitless but even fraught with danger. He describes excuses for sins as wicked words, and begs and beseeches God to preserve his heart from so great a fault.⁷⁶ And rightly so. A man who excuses himself sins against his own interests⁷⁷ by rejecting the medicine of forgiveness; with his own mouth he cuts himself off from life. What greater wickedness is there than to take up arms against your own salvation, to stab yourself with the sword-point of your own tongue? If a man is mean to himself, to whom will he be good?⁷⁸

73. 1 Sam 15:30.

76. Ps 140:4.

74. Jas 4:6.

77. Sir 19:6.

75. Gen 3:12.

78. Sir 14:5.

VIII. 12. You must confess your sins in the spirit of faith, that you may confess them with the hope that does not doubt of pardon; to do otherwise would be to condemn rather than justify yourself. Both Judas who betrayed the Lord, and Cain who murdered his own brother, admitted their sin, but without hope of pardon. Judas said: "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood;"⁷⁹ Cain's words were: "My sin is too great to be pardoned."⁸⁰ Though they admitted the truth of their sin, their confession was fruitless because faithless. These three qualities of confession, along with the four previously ascribed to compunction, complete the number seven.

13. When these conditions are fulfilled both in your sorrow and your confession, when you are thus assured of life, you become certain that Jesus, who produced these divinely willed effects in you, was called by no empty name; it was not in vain that he followed after the staff he had sent in advance. He did not come in vain because he did not come empty. How could he have been empty in whom the fullness of divine life dwelt?⁸¹ Nor was the Holy Spirit given to him by measure.⁸² He came too when the fullness of time had come.⁸³ All of which indicate that he was full in every sense. And truly filled, since the Father had anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows;⁸⁴ he anointed and sent him to us full of grace and truth.⁸⁵ He was anointed that he might anoint others. All who merited to receive of his fullness have been anointed by him.⁸⁶ Hence he could say: "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord."⁸⁷ He came, as you have heard, to medicate our wounds and to soothe our pains; therefore he came as one anointed, meek and humble and full of mercy for all who call upon him.⁸⁸ He knew he was coming down to those who were sick, and he appeared

79. Mt 27:4.

82. Jn 3:34.

85. Jn 1:14.

88. Ps 85:5.

80. Gen 4:13.

83. Gal 4:4.

86. Jn 1:16.

81. Col 2:9.

84. Ps 44:8.

87. Is 61:1f.

to them as the one they needed. Because their infirmities were manifold he showed his competence by bringing with him medicines of all kinds. He brought "a spirit of wisdom and insight, a spirit of counsel and strength, a spirit of knowledge and piety, and a spirit of fear of the Lord."⁸⁹

14. These are so many phials filled with medicines⁹⁰ prepared by this physician from heaven, to heal the wounds of the unfortunate man who fell into the hands of robbers.⁹¹ They are seven in number,⁹² very apt for producing the seven yawnings of which we have been speaking. These phials contained the spirit that gives life.⁹³ From them he poured oil upon my wounds; wine too but in smaller measure.⁹⁴ In doing this he adapted himself to my weakness, that mercy might triumph over judgment,⁹⁵ just as oil rests on top of wine in a vessel. So he took five measures of oil with him, but only two of wine.⁹⁶ Fear and strength are symbolized by the wine; the other five, because of their soothing effects, are represented by the oil. In the spirit of strength, like a hero fighting-mad with wine,⁹⁷ he descended into Sheol, breaking bronze gates open and smashing iron bars,⁹⁸ to bind up the strong man⁹⁹ and free those held in prison. He descended too in the spirit of fear, not afraid but inspiring fear.

15. O Wisdom, sweetly powerful and powerfully sweet, with what skill of healing in wine and oil do you restore my soul's health. Powerfully for me and sweet to me. You deploy your strength from one end of the earth to the other, ordering all things sweetly,¹⁰⁰ driving off all hostile powers and cherishing the weak. Heal me, Lord, and I shall really be healed,¹⁰¹ I shall sing praise to your name¹⁰² and cry out: "Your name is oil poured out.¹⁰³ Not wine poured out—for I do not wish to be put on trial¹⁰⁴—but oil, for you crown me with love and tenderness.¹⁰⁵ Oil by all means, for since it floats above all other liquids with which it mixes,

89. Is 11:2f.

91. Lk 10:30.

94. Lk 10:34.

97. Ps 77:65.

100. Wis 8:1.

103. Song 1:2.

92. See JB, Is 11:2f., note C.

95. Jas 2:13.

98. Ps 106:16.

101. Jer 17:14.

104. Ps 142:2.

90. Rev 5:8.

93. Rev 11:11.

96. Lk 16:6.

99. Mt 12:29.

102. Ps 7:17.

105. Ps 102:4.

it clearly designates a name that is above all names.¹⁰⁶ O Name utterly dear, utterly sweet! O Name renowned, predestined, sublime and exalted above all for ever.¹⁰⁷ This is truly the oil that makes a man's face shine,¹⁰⁸ that anoints the head of the man who fasts, causing him to ignore the oil of sinners.¹⁰⁹ This is the new Name which the mouth of the Lord has conferred,¹¹⁰ the Name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."¹¹¹ Not the Jews only, but all who call on that name will be saved,¹¹² for it has been poured out without limit. This was the Father's gift to the Son, the Church's Bridegroom, our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever.¹¹³ Amen.

106. Phil 2:9.

109. Ps 140:15; Mt 6:17.

112. Joel 2:32.

107. Dan 3:52.

110. Is 62:2.

113. Rom 1:25.

108. Ps 103:15.

111. Lk 2:21.

SERMON 17

ON THE WAYS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE ENVY OF THE DEVIL

DO YOU THINK WE HAVE ADVANCED far enough into a sphere that is holy to God, in unravelling this wonderful mystery, or should we dare follow the Holy Spirit into still more secret places to search for meanings that may yet be attained? For the Holy Spirit searches not only the minds and hearts of men¹ but even the depths of God;² so whether it be into our own hearts or into the divine mysteries, I shall be secure in following him wherever he goes.³ He must keep watch over our hearts and our minds,⁴ lest we think him present when he is not, and follow the erratic light of our own feelings instead. He comes and goes as he wills, and no man can easily discover whence he comes and whither he goes.⁵ Ignorance of this will not lessen our hopes of salvation; but to be ignorant of when he comes and when he goes would certainly involve risk. Unless we use the utmost vigilance in attending to these gift-laden visits of the Holy Spirit, we shall neither desire him when he seems absent nor respond to him when present. If he withdraws from us to stimulate us to a more eager search for him, how shall we seek for him if we do not perceive his absence? Or when he comes to animate us, how shall we give him the welcome due his majesty if his visit passes unnoticed? The man who is indifferent to his absence will be led

1. Ps 7:10.

4. Phil 4:7.

2. 1 Cor 2:10.

5. Jn 3:8.

3. Rev 14:4.

astray by other influences; the man who is blind to his coming cannot offer thanks for the visit.

2. When Elisha perceived that his master was about to be taken away from him, he asked for a favor.⁶ He obtained it, as you know, only on the condition that he would see him as he was being taken. This is an allegory recorded for our instruction.⁷ This story of the prophets carries both a lesson and a warning, to make us vigilant and careful about the work of salvation ceaselessly performed in our inmost being with all the skill and sweetness of the Holy Spirit's artistry. If we do not wish to be deprived of a twofold gift, let us make sure that this heaven-sent Director, who can teach us all things,⁸ is never taken away from us without our knowledge. Let him never find us unprepared when he comes, but always with faces uplifted and hearts expanded to receive the copious blessing of the Lord. Let him find us like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage-feast,⁹ for he never comes empty-handed from heaven's richly-laden table. Therefore we must watch, even hour by hour, for we do not know at what hour he will come and depart again.¹⁰ The Holy Spirit comes and goes, and if a man can stand firmly only with his support, it follows that he must fall when abandoned by him;¹¹ fall, yes, but never fatally, since the Lord supports him by the hand.¹² Persons who are spiritual or whom the Holy Spirit purposes to make spiritual, never cease to experience these alternations; he visits them every morning and tests them at any moment.¹³ For a righteous man falls seven times and rises again,¹⁴ provided that he falls in the daytime and so is able to see his fall, to know that he has fallen, to make up his mind to rise and look for a helping hand, and say: "Your favor, Lord, stood me on a peak impregnable; but then you hid your face and I was terrified."¹⁵

II. 3. It is scarcely possible to avoid doubts about the truth when we lack the light of the Holy Spirit; but it is another thing to

6. 2 Kings 2:9f.

7. 1 Cor 10:11.

8. 1 Jn 2:27.

9. Lk 12:36.

10. Mt 24:42; Lk 12:40.

11. 1 Cor 10:12.

12. Ps 36:24.

13. Job 7:18.

14. Prov 24:16.

15. Ps 29:8.

hanker after erroneous opinions which a man might easily guard against if he would acknowledge his ignorance, as Job did when he said: "And even if it be true that I have erred, my error remains with myself."¹⁶ Ignorance, an evil mother, has borne two evil daughters, falsehood and doubt, the first is the more reprobate, the other more an object of compassion; the first more pernicious, the other more troubled. When the Holy Spirit speaks, both of these yield, for he speaks not merely the truth but the certain truth. He is the Spirit of truth¹⁷ with whom falsehood cannot be reconciled; and the spirit of wisdom, who will not accept opinions that are equivocal or obscure, since he is a reflection of eternal life, so pure that he pervades and permeates all things.¹⁸ When this Spirit is silent we must be alert and hold falsehood in abhorrence, even if bound in the clutches of perplexing incertitude. Doubting the truth of an opinion is vastly different from rashly proposing something of which we know nothing. Either let the Holy Spirit always speak, a procedure that no influence of ours can procure; or let him at least warn us when he withdraws into silence, that his very silence may then be our guide; otherwise, mistakenly thinking he is still leading us on, we shall pursue with disastrous assurance an erroneous course of our own. Even if he does keep us in suspense, may he never abandon us to what is false. A man may tentatively express what is false without incurring the guilt of a lie, while another man may lie in asserting a truth of which he has no knowledge. Because the first man, far from maintaining non-facts to be facts, rather states he believes what he does believe, he speaks in truth, even though what he believes is not true; but the second man, who says he is certain when he is not, does not speak in truth, even though what he asserts is true.

4. I have said these things for the sake of those who are unaware of such pitfalls, and now I shall follow what I trust to be the guidance of the Spirit who lights my way, taking account as far as I can of the warnings I have issued. I will try to be faithful to my own teaching lest someone say in turn to me: "You who teach

16. Job 19:4.

17. Jn 15:26.

18. Wis 7:26.

others, will you not teach yourself?"¹⁹ We must observe the distinction between what is clear and what is doubtful, not casting doubt on the one nor rashly upholding the other. This is where we must hope for direction from the Spirit, for even assiduous efforts on our part may be altogether insufficient.

III. What man knows whether the judgment of God over men, that we discussed in a previous sermon,²⁰ was not preceded by a judgment pronounced in heaven?

5. Is it possible that Lucifer, son of the morning,²¹ yielding precipitately to the impulse of pride, began to envy the outpouring of oil on our human race before he was cast out into the darkness? In the rage that possessed him did he murmur and say to himself: "Why this waste?"²² I do not hold that the Holy Spirit has made this known, nor do I hold the contrary; I simply do not know. But even though some may think it incredible, it could have happened that because of his lofty endowments of wisdom and grace,²³ he could have foreseen that members of the human race would one day be raised to be his equals in glory. And if he did foresee this it was because it was revealed to him in the Word of God. Then, stung by a wild impulse of envy, he plotted to maintain as subjects those whom he scorned as companions. To him they were by nature both lower and weaker, unworthy to be fellow-citizens, to share an equal glory. Was this impious scheming of his the consequence of his presumptuous self-exaltation, of his pretensions to a seat of power? For he said: I will climb up to the heavens; I will sit in the recesses of the north.²⁴ He would assume the very likeness of the most high God; for just as God, from his throne above the cherubim,²⁵ governs the whole angelic host, so Lucifer, from his usurped position, would control the race of men. God forbid. He plotted mischief in his bed,²⁶ let him be trapped in his own plot,²⁷ for we refuse to acknowledge any overlord but our Creator. Not the devil

19. Rom 2:21.

22. Mt 26:8.

25. 1 Sam 4:4.

20. See Sermon 14:1.

23. Ezek 28:12.

26. Ps 35:5.

21. Is 14:12.

24. Is 14:13.

27. Ps 26:12.

but the Lord will be judge of the world;²⁸ he who is our God for ever and ever will be our ruler for ever and ever.²⁹

6. In heaven then, the devil conceived a bitter resentment that in the garden of Paradise came forth as iniquity,³⁰ the offspring of malice, the mother of death and of every other misery; all these evils have pride as their first parent. For although it was through the devil's envy that death entered into the world,³¹ every sin has its origin in pride.³² But what has he gained from it? For you, Lord, are still in our midst, we are called by your name;³³ and the people you have chosen,³⁴ the Church of the redeemed, cries out: "Your name is oil poured out."³⁵ And when I in turn am cast forth, this oil comes pouring after me and upon me, because despite your anger you remember to be merciful.³⁶ Satan however has gained a hold over all who yield themselves to pride.³⁷ He has made his realm of this world's darkness,³⁸ yet his proud assaults serve but to increase the realm of the humble. While that realm remains his, temporal as it is, he establishes multitudes of the humble on high and eternal thrones. What a happy outcome, that this tyrant who would hammer the humble into subjection, should unwittingly be fashioning their eternal crowns for them. Attacking along every front, he is everywhere forced to yield. For always and everywhere it is God who will judge his people, it is he who will save the children of the needy and crush their oppressors.³⁹ Always and everywhere he will defend his own, he will drive off their persecutors, take away the scepter that the wicked wield over the virtuous, lest the virtuous in turn should take to evil.⁴⁰ A time is coming when he will break the bow completely, shatter the spear and burn the shields with fire.⁴¹ As for you, unhappy one, you set up your seat in the north, a region of cloud and cold;⁴² and see! the poor are being raised up from the dust and the needy from the dunghill, that they may be placed among the princes and attain a seat of honor.⁴³

28. Ps 9:9.

29. Ps 47:15.

30. Ps 7:15.

31. Wis 2:24.

32. Sir 10:15.

33. Jer 14:9.

34. 1 Pet 2:9.

35. Song 1:2.

36. Hab 3:2.

37. Job 41:25.

38. Eph 6:12.

39. Ps 71:4.

40. Ps 124:4.

41. Ps 45:10.

42. Is 14:13.

43. 1 Sam 2:8; Ps 112:7.

To your utter frustration you will see that the poor and needy have cause to praise God's name.⁴⁴

7. We thank you, Father of orphans and Vindicator of abandoned children,⁴⁵ because a mountain fat and fertile has shed its warmth upon us.⁴⁶ The heavens have poured down rain at the presence of the God of Sinai.⁴⁷ The oil is poured out. There is universal glorification of the Name which Satan envied because it was ours, and we live in its shadow. It is acclaimed, I repeat, in the hearts and words of children; even in the mouths of infants and babes at the breast praise is assured.⁴⁸ The wicked one will see this and be filled with fury;⁴⁹ an unrelenting fury that will feed the unquenchable fire prepared for him and his ministers.⁵⁰ "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this."⁵¹

IV. How wonderful your love for me, my God, my love! How wonderful your love for me, everywhere mindful of me, everywhere eager for the welfare of one who is needy and poor, protecting him both from the arrogance of men and from the might of evil spirits. Both in heaven and on earth, O Lord, you accuse my accusers, you attack my attackers;⁵² everywhere you bring help, always you are close to my right hand lest I be disturbed.⁵³ "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live, I will sing praise to my God while I have being."⁵⁴ How great are his powers, what wonders has he not done!⁵⁵ The first and greatest of his achievements is that revealed to me by one initiated to his mysteries, the Virgin Mary: "He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent away empty."⁵⁶ The second you have heard of too, it is like the first: "That those without sight may see, and those with sight turn blind."⁵⁷ These two judgments are the poor man's consolation, they enable him to say: "Remembering your rulings in the past, Lord, I take comfort."⁵⁸

44. Ps 73:21.

47. Ps 67:9.

50. Mk 9:44.

53. Ps 15:8.

56. Lk 1:52-53.

45. Ps 67:6.

48. Mt 21:16.

51. Is 9:7.

54. Ps 103:33; Ps 145:2.

57. Mt 22:39; Jn 9:39.

46. Ps 67:16.

49. Ps 111:10.

52. Ps 34:1.

55. Ps 77:4.

58. Ps 118:52.

8. Let us return now to ourselves, let us examine our paths,⁵⁹ and in order to accomplish this in truth, let us invoke the Spirit of truth,⁶⁰ let us call to him from the deep into which he has led us, because he leads us on the way by which we discover ourselves, and without him we can do nothing.⁶¹ Nor should we be afraid that he will disdain to come down to us, for the contrary is true: he is displeased if we attempt even the least thing without him. For he is not one "who passes and does not return,"⁶² he leads us on from brightness to brightness because he is the Spirit of the Lord.⁶³ Sometimes he fills us with rapture by communication of his light, sometimes he adapts himself to our weakness and sends beams of light into the dark about us.⁶⁴ But whether we are raised above ourselves or left with ourselves, let us stay always in the light, always walk as children of the light.⁶⁵ And now that we have passed through the shadow-land of allegories, it is time to explore the great plains of moral truths.⁶⁶ Our faith has been strengthened, let our lives reveal its influence; our intellects have been enlightened, let them prescribe the right behavior. For they have sound sense who do this,⁶⁷ if they direct their actions and understanding toward the praise and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ,⁶⁸ who is blessed for ever.⁶⁹

59. Lam 3:40.

62. Ps 77:39.

65. Eph 5:8.

68. Phil 1:11.

60. Jn 14:17.

63. 2 Cor 3:18.

66. See Sermon 16:1.

69. Rom 1:25.

61. Jn 15:5.

64. Ps 17:29.

67. Ps 110:10.

SERMON 18

THE TWO OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“YOUR NAME IS OIL POURED OUT.”¹ OF what truth of our interior life does the Holy Spirit wish to assure us by means of this text? He refers to the experience of a twofold operation, one by which he inwardly strengthens the virtues that lead us to salvation, the other by which he outwardly endows us with serviceable gifts. The former is of benefit to ourselves, the latter to our neighbors. For example, faith, hope and charity are given to us for our own sake, without them we cannot be saved. But the gift of wise and learned speech, the power to heal, to prophesy, and endowments of this kind without which we can fully achieve our own salvation, are undoubtedly meant to be used for our neighbor’s salvation.² And these operations of the Holy Spirit, that we take note of either in ourselves or in others, are named from their method of functioning: we call them infusion and effusion. To which of them may we suitably apply the words: “Your name is oil poured out”? Is it not to effusion? If he had meant infusion he would have said “poured in.” When the bride says: “Your name is oil poured out,” she refers to the perfumes sprinkled on her breasts, attributing their scent to the Bridegroom’s name, as if it were an unguent poured on her breasts. Any man who perceives that he is endowed with an exterior grace enabling him to influence others, can also say to the Lord: “Your name is oil poured out.”

1. Song 1:2.

2. 1 Cor 12:8ff.

2. At this point we need to be warned not to give away what we have received for our own welfare, nor to retain for ourselves what must be expended for others. For example, you keep for yourself what belongs to your neighbor, if along with your full endowment of interior virtues you are also adorned with the external gifts of knowledge and eloquence, and, through fear or sloth or ill-judged humility, smother this gift of speech that could be of help to so many, in a useless and even pernicious silence; for "the people's curse is on the man who hoards the wheat."³ On the other hand, you squander and lose what is meant to be your own if, before you are totally permeated by the infusion of the Holy Spirit, you rashly proceed to pour out your unfulfilled self upon others; you contravene the law which says: "You must not put the first-born of your herd to work, nor shear the first-born of your flock."⁴ You deprive yourself of the life and salvation which you impart to another if, lacking right intention and inspired by self-conceit,⁵ you become infected with the poison of worldly ambition that swells into a deadly ulcer and destroys you.

3. The man who is wise, therefore, will see his life as more like a reservoir than a canal. The canal simultaneously pours out what it receives; the reservoir retains the water till it is filled, then discharges the overflow without loss to itself. He knows that a curse is on the man who allows his own property to degenerate. And if you think my opinion worthless, then listen to one who is wiser than I: "The fool," said Solomon, "comes out with all his feelings at once, but the wise man subdues and restrains them."⁶ Today there are many in the Church who act like canals, the reservoirs are far too rare. So urgent is the charity of those through whom the streams of heavenly doctrine flow to us, that they want to pour it forth before they have been filled; they are more ready to speak than to listen, impatient to teach what they have not grasped, and full of presumption to govern others while they know not how to govern themselves.

3. Prov 11:26.

4. Deut 15:19.

5. Gal 5:26.

6. Prov 29:11.

II. I am convinced that no degree of the charity that leads to salvation may be preferred to that suggested by the Wise Man: "Have pity on your own soul, pleasing God."⁷ If I have but a little oil, sufficient for my own anointing, do you suppose I should give it to you and be left with nothing?⁸ I am keeping it for myself, utterly unwilling to proffer it to anyone except at the Prophet's bidding. And should any of you, thinking me to be better than I seem or than my words suggest,⁹ insist on asking for it, here is my answer to him: "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves."¹⁰ But charity, you reply, does not seek what is its own.¹¹ And do you know why? It does not seek what is its own precisely because it has it. Who seeks for what he possesses? Charity never lacks what is her own, all that she needs for her own security. Not alone does she have it, she abounds with it. She wants this abundance for herself that she may share it with all; and she reserves enough for herself so that she disappoints nobody. For charity is perfect only when full.

4. But you, my brother, your salvation is not yet assured; your charity as yet is either non-existent or so meager and reed-like that it bends with every breeze, puts its trust in every spirit,¹² and is carried along by every wind of doctrine;¹³ or it is so great that you transcend the limits of the commandment by loving your neighbor more than yourself;¹⁴ or yet again so unsound that, contrary to the commandment, it bows to flattery, flinches under fear, is upset by sadness, shrivelled by avarice, entangled by ambition, disquieted by suspicions, tormented by insults, exhausted by anxieties, puffed up by honors, consumed by envy. If you discover this chaos in your own interior, what madness drives you to insinuate yourself into other people's business? But listen to what a prudent and vigilant charity advises: "This does not mean that to give relief to others you ought to make things difficult for yourselves: it is a question of balancing."¹⁵ "Do not be over-virtuous."¹⁶ It is enough that you

7. Sir 30:24.

10. Mt 25:9.

13. Eph 4:14.

16. Eccles 7:17.

8. 2 Kings 4:2-5.

11. 1 Cor 13:5.

14. Mt 19:19.

9. 2 Cor 12:6.

12. 1 Jn 4:1.

15. 2 Cor 8:13.

love your neighbor as yourself;¹⁷ this is the balancing to which the Apostle refers. David says: "My soul will feast most richly, on my lips a song of joy and, in my mouth, praise."¹⁸ To preclude a mere empty yawning, he wishes that infusion should precede the effusion, an infusion to the fullest capacity that gushes out. In this he shows prudence, his relieving of others does not embarrass himself; and he has a right intention, since he imitates him of whose fullness we have all received.¹⁹ You too must learn to await this fullness before pouring out your gifts, do not try to be more generous than God. The reservoir resembles the fountain that runs to form a stream or spreads to form a pool only when its own waters are brimming over. The reservoir is not ashamed to be no more lavish than the spring that fills it. And so, he who is the primal Fountain of life,²⁰ full in himself and filled with himself, gushed forth and danced into the secret places of the heavens about him, to fill them all with his favors.²¹ And having endowed these remotest heights and recesses, he burst upon our earth, saving men and beasts through his munificence, multiplying his mercies everywhere.²² When he had first filled up the secret places, his teeming mercies billowed over;²³ they poured upon the earth and drenched it, to multiply its riches.²⁴ You must imitate this process.²⁵ First be filled, and then control the outpouring. The charity that is benign and prudent does not flow outwards until it abounds within. "My son," said Solomon, "do not let yourself drift away."²⁶ And the Apostle says: "We ought then to turn our minds more attentively than before to what we have been taught, so that we do not drift away."²⁷ See what is involved here. Are you holier than Paul, wiser than Solomon? Besides, I cannot see myself being enriched by your wasting of your powers. For if you are mean to yourself, to whom will you be good?²⁸ Help me out of your abundance if you have it; if not, then spare yourself the trouble.

17. Mk 12:31.

20. Ps 35:10.

23. Dan 9:18.

26. Prov 3:21.

18. Ps 62:6.

21. Ps 103:28.

24. Ps 64:10.

27. Heb 2:1.

19. Jn 1:16.

22. Ps 35:7f.

25. Lk 10:37.

28. Sir 14:5.

III. 5. But I wish to remind you now of the principles necessary for our salvation and how to apply them, the truths that must be infused into us and their order of importance, before we can presume to pour ourselves out. Circumstances oblige me to be as brief as possible, for the time's quick passage demands that I bring this sermon to a close. Just as a doctor comes to a wounded man, so the Holy Spirit comes to the soul. Is it possible to find any person whom the devil's sword does not wound, even after the wound of original sin has been healed by the medicine of baptism? Therefore, when the Spirit draws near to a soul that says: "My wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness,"²⁹ what is the first thing he should do? Before all else he must amputate the ulcerous tumor that has grown upon the wound and prevents its healing. This ulcer, caused by inveterate bad habits, must be sliced away with the scalpel of piercing sorrow. The pain will be bitter, but it can be alleviated with the ointment of devotion which is nothing other than the joy born of the hope of pardon. This in turn springs from the power of self-control, from victory over sin. Soon the victor is pouring out words of thanks: "You have loosed my bonds, I will offer you the thanksgiving sacrifice."³⁰ He then applies the medicine of penance, a poultice of fastings, vigils, prayers, and other tasks that penitents perform. And as he toils he must be fed with the food of good works that he may not falter. We are not left in doubt about what the necessary food is: "My food," said Christ, "is to do the will of my Father."³¹ Hence works motivated by love, that are a sure source of strength, should accompany the performance of penances. For instance it is said: "Alms is a most effective offering for all those who give it in the presence of the Most High."³² Food causes thirst, therefore one must drink, so let the food of good works be moistened with the beverage of prayer, that a work well done may rest quietly in the stomach of conscience and give pleasure to God. In prayer one drinks the wine that gladdens a man's heart,³³ the intoxicating wine of the Spirit that drowns all memory of the

29. Ps 37:6.

30. Ps 115:16f.

31. Jn 4:34.

32. Tob 4:12.

33. Ps 103:15.

pleasures of the flesh. It drenches anew the arid recesses of the conscience, stimulates digestion of the meats of good works, fills the faculties of the soul with a robust faith, a solid hope, a love that is living and true; it enriches all the actions of our life.

6. The sick man has had his food and drink; what should he do now but take his ease and let the sweat of his labors dry while he enjoys the quiet of contemplation?³⁴ Falling asleep in the midst of his prayer he dreams of God; what he sees is a dim reflection in a mirror, not a vision face to face.³⁵ However, although it be but a vague apprehension and not an actual vision, a fleeting glimpse of the sparkling glory as it passes, utterly delicate in its impact, yet he burns with love and says: "At night my soul longs for you and my spirit in me seeks for you."³⁶ A love like this is full of zeal; it is a love becoming the Bridegroom's friend,³⁷ the love that must inspire the faithful and prudent servant whom the Lord appoints over his household.³⁸ It fills the soul's capacity, grows heated and brims over, gushing with abandon into streamlets. This is the love that cries out: "Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is scandalized and I am not inflamed?"³⁹ Let such a man preach, let him bear fruit, let him show new signs and do fresh wonders,⁴⁰ for vanity can find no toehold in the man whom charity totally possesses. A total love is the law in all its fullness, it can effectively fill the heart's capacity.⁴¹ Finally God himself is love,⁴² and nothing created can satisfy the man who is made to the image of God,⁴³ except the God who is love, who alone is above all created natures. The man who has not yet attained to this love is promoted to office at the gravest risk to himself, no matter how distinguished he be with other virtues. Even if he knows everything, if he gives all his goods to the poor and lets his body be taken for burning, without charity he is worthless.⁴⁴ See how precious the graces that must first be infused, so that when we venture to pour them out we may dispense them from a spirit that is filled rather than impoverished. We need first

34. Song 2:4.

37. Jn 3:29.

40. Sir 36:6.

43. Gen 1:27.

35. 1 Cor 13:12.

38. Mt 24:45.

41. Rom 13:10.

44. 1 Cor 13:2f.

36. Is 26:9.

39. 2 Cor 11:29.

42. 1 Jn 4:16.

of all compunction of heart, then fervor of spirit; thirdly, the labor of penance; fourthly, works of charity; fifthly, zeal for prayer; sixthly, leisure for contemplation; seventhly, love in all its fullness. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit,⁴⁵ accomplished by the process called infusion; and, in so far as it has taken place those services called effusion can be truly and hence safely performed to the praise and glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ,⁴⁶ who with the Father and the same Holy Spirit lives and reigns, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

45. 1 Cor 12:11.

46. Phil 1:11.

SERMON 19

THE LOVES OF THE ANGELS

THE LOVE-INSPIRED BRIDE will go on speaking, will chatter without end about her Bridegroom's excellence; and in order to entice more favors from him she shows that the ones already received have not been fruitless.¹ To the words that have so long preoccupied us she adds: "That is why the maidens love you beyond measure."² In effect she means: "It was not in vain, not without purpose, that you emptied out the power of your name, O Beloved, and poured it on my breasts; that is why the maidens love you so much." But why exactly? Because of the outpouring of your name, because of the breasts it has suffused. It is this that aroused their love of the Bridegroom, this that inspired their affections. No sooner had the bride received the infused gift than they, who could never stay far from their mother's side, at once perceived its fragrance. Filled with its sweetness they proclaim: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."³ The bride commends their devotedness: "This, O Beloved," she says, "is the fruit of the outpouring of your name, it is why the maidens love you. They perceive the outpouring of something that surpasses their capacity to absorb in its entirety; and so they give you their love." Thus, as far as the maidens are concerned, the outpouring makes your name knowable, knowledge makes it lovable. Those whose capacity is greater enjoy the name in its fullness without the need for an outpouring.

1. 1 Cor 15:10.

2. Song 1:2.

3. Rom 5:5.

II. 2. The angels, looking with undeviating gaze into the profound abyss of the divine judgments,⁴ are filled with inexpressible joy at the sight of their supreme righteousness; it is their glory that, through their ministry, these judgments are put into operation and made known to men. For this reason they so rightly love the Lord Christ. Scripture says: "The truth is they are all spirits whose work is service, sent to help those who will be the heirs of salvation."⁵ And the archangels—whom we must regard as differing in some degree from those called angels—experience a delight that is filled with awe as they enter more closely into the counsels of eternal wisdom, and are commissioned to execute them with supreme skill at the proper place and time. Here you have the reason why these in turn love the Lord Christ. Other blessed spirits are named Virtues because their God-given vocation is to explore and admire with a happy curiosity the hidden and eternal causes of signs and wonders, signs that they display throughout the earth whenever they please by the powerful manipulation of the elements. As a consequence, these naturally burn with love for the Lord of Hosts,⁶ for Christ, the power of God.⁷ For it is an occupation full of sweetness and grace to contemplate the obscure mysteries of wisdom in Wisdom itself,⁸ a source of the greatest honor and glory that the effects produced by causes hidden in the Word of God should be revealed for the world's admiration by their ministry.

3. Yet other spirits are named Powers. While these find their happiness in contemplating and praising the divine omnipotence of our crucified Lord that extends so effectively into every place,⁹ they are also gifted with the power to overthrow and subdue the hostile power of demons and men in defense of those who will be the heirs of salvation.¹⁰ And surely these have a perfect reason for loving the Lord Jesus: Above them are the Principalities, who, contemplating him from their higher vantage-point, clearly perceive that he is the source whence all things spring, the first-born of all creation.¹¹ So great is the princely dignity with which they

4. Ps 35:7.

7. 1 Cor 1:24.

10. Heb 1:14.

5. Heb 1:14.

8. Ps 50:6.

11. Col 1:15.

6. Ps 23:10.

9. Wis 8:1.

are endowed that nothing on earth is outside their dominion; and from their exalted seat of power they change and regulate at will the fall of kingdoms and governments and officials of any rank. According to individual merits they place those who are first in the last place and the last first;¹² they pull down the mighty from their thrones and exalt the lowly.¹³ This is the source of their incentive to love. Then come the Dominations, who also love the Lord. And the reason? With a presumption meriting only praise they probe more piercingly and sublimely into the limitless and insuperable lordship of Christ, whose presence and power reach everywhere throughout the universe. With a planned excellence, he bends all things from the highest to the lowest to the sway of his supremely upright will: the succession of the seasons, the movement of bodies, the propensities of the mind. He exercises this control with so provident a care that not one of these phenomena suffers the minutest failure in its functioning, not even by an iota;¹⁴ and he does it with an effort so facile that he feels not the least disquietude or misgiving. Fascinated by the flawless tranquillity with which the Lord of hosts governs the universe,¹⁵ they are caught up in a wondrous ecstasy of contemplation that is utterly delightful, utterly intense; and, consciously transported into the mighty ocean of God's splendor, they find themselves in a secret haven so serenely calm, so completely and securely peaceful, that while they recline there at ease the other angelic hosts, out of reverence for their prerogative of unimpeachable dominance, perform official services on their behalf.

4. Next come the Thrones, who are the seat of God. These spirits have a more just cause and more abundant reasons for loving than all the others we have mentioned. For when you enter the king's palace do you not see that though there are footstools, chairs and armchairs in every room, the king's throne is on a higher level? You do not have to ask where the king usually sits; you notice at once the seat that is more ornate and more elevated than the rest. And so you must understand that the adorned beauty of

12. Mt 19:30.

13. Lk 1:52.

14. Mt 5:18.

15. Wis 12:18.

these spirits surpasses that of all the others, for upon them by a special and stupendous act of graciousness, the God of majesty has chosen to take his seat. If a seated posture symbolizes the teaching office, one may presume that Christ, the Wisdom of God,¹⁶ our unique teacher in heaven and on earth,¹⁷ although reaching everywhere because of his spiritual power,¹⁸ yet imparts a special light to these in particular on whom he is throned, and from this august rostrum teaches knowledge to angels and to men.¹⁹ The angels receive knowledge of God's judgments, the archangels of his counsels. The Virtues discover the time, place and nature of the signs they are to perform; and all, whether Powers or Principalities or Dominations, learn the extent of their official duties, the privileges of their exalted rank and a caution to which all must pay heed, not to abuse the power they have received for the sake of their own glory or convenience.

5. Then there are those multitudes of spirits called Cherubim. If we understand them in terms of their title, it seems to me that they possess nothing received from or by means of the others; for they are free to drink their fill from the very fountainhead, under the benign patronage of the Lord Jesus himself, who leads them on to the very fullness of truth and eagerly unfolds before their gaze the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hoarded in the depths of his being.²⁰ Neither do the spirits we call Seraphim depend on them for anything, for God, who is love,²¹ has so drawn and assimilated them to himself, so filled them with the ardor of affection that burns in himself, that they seem to be one spirit with God,²² just as fire that flames into the air imparts its own heat and color to it and the enkindled air becomes part of the very fire. The Cherubim's bent is to contemplate God's infinite knowledge,²³ the Seraphim adhere to the love that never ends.²⁴ Hence they derive their names from that occupation in which each is pre-eminent: the name Cherub denotes one filled with knowledge, the name Seraph one inflamed with or inciting to love.

16. 1 Cor 1:24.

19. Ps 93:10.

22. 1 Cor 6:17.

17. Mt 23:8.

20. Col 2:3.

23. Ps 146:5.

18. Wis 8:1.

21. 1 Jn 4:8.

24. 1 Cor 13:8.

6. God, therefore, is loved by the angels on account of the supreme rectitude of his judgments; by the archangels for the flawless ordering of his plans; by the Virtues for the overwhelming benignity revealed in his working of miracles by which he most aptly attracts unbelievers to the faith; by the Powers because of the efficacy of that righteous power by which he repels and wards off the persecutions fomented by the evil against the good; by the Principalities for that eternal power that is the source whence every creature, high and low, spiritual and corporeal, takes the principle of its being and existence. It deploys its strength from one end of the earth to the other.²⁵ The Dominations love him because of the inimitable serenity of his will, for although he controls all things by the strength of his arm,²⁶ a greater power is revealed in the imperturbable tranquillity, the innate gentleness by which he sweetly orders all things.²⁷ The Thrones are drawn to him by the good-will with which he ungrudgingly communicates the light of his wisdom²⁸ and the anointing by which he freely teaches everything.²⁹ The Cherubim are moved to love because the Lord is a God of knowledge;³⁰ he knows what each one needs in order to be saved, and distributes with judicious providence the gifts that he sees to be advantageous to those who ask with proper dispositions. And finally the Seraphim love him because he is love,³¹ hates nothing that he has made,³² and desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.³³

III. 7. All these, as we see, love God according to their particular modes of understanding. But the maidens have less understanding and therefore less knowledge. They are not well equipped to penetrate sublime truths. Still infants in Christ,³⁴ they must be fed with milk and oil. The source of their ability to love is in the breasts of the spouse. The odor of the spouse's outpoured oil rouses them to taste and experience how sweet the Lord is.³⁵ And when she

25. Wis 8:1.

28. Wis 7:13.

31. 1 Jn 4:8.

34. 1 Cor 3:1f.

26. Job 22:8.

29. 1 Jn 2:27.

32. Wis 11:25.

35. Ps 33:9.

27. Wis 8:1.

30. 1 Sam 2:3.

33. 1 Tim 2:4.

perceives the ardor of their love, she turns to the Bridegroom and says: "Your name is oil poured out, therefore the maidens love you beyond measure."³⁶ What does she mean by "beyond measure"? Greatly, vehemently, ardently. Shall I say that this spiritual doctrine may be indirectly applied to those of you who have recently arrived, as a reproof of that indiscreet zeal or rather that incredibly obstinate intemperance which we have repeatedly attempted to restrain? You have no desire to be content with the common life.³⁷ The regular fast is not enough for you, nor the solemn vigils, nor the rules of the house, nor the amount of food and clothing we have allotted to you. You want to have your own private ways rather than share what is common. In the beginning you entrusted yourselves to our care, why do you take charge of yourselves again? For now you have again for master not me but that self-will by which, on the testimony of your own consciences, you have so often offended God. It is that which urges you not to show pity for nature's needs, not to yield to reason, not to respect the advice or example of the seniors, not to obey us. Are you unaware that obedience is better than sacrifice?³⁸ Have you not read in your Rule that what is done without the permission of the spiritual father shall be ascribed to presumption and vainglory and not reckoned meritorious?³⁹ Have you not read in the Gospel the example of obedience given by the boy Jesus as a way to holiness for young people? For when he had stayed behind in Jerusalem and explained that he must be busy with his Father's affairs,⁴⁰ yet because his parents would not concur with him he did not disdain to follow them to Nazareth; and so we have the Master obeying his disciples, God obeying men, God's Word and Wisdom obeying a carpenter and his wife. And what is the comment of Sacred Scripture? It says: "He was subject to them."⁴¹ How long will you be wise in your own eyes?⁴² God entrusts himself to mortals and obeys them, and

36. Song 1:2. The word *nimis*, "beyond measure," is not found in the Hebrew, Greek or Latin texts.

37. See RB, c. 7, Eighth degree of humility.

38. 1 Sam 15:22.

39. RB, c. 49.

40. Lk 2:43-49.

41. Lk 2:51.

42. Is 5:21.

will you still walk in your own ways?⁴³ You received the good spirit,⁴⁴ but you have not used it well. What I now fear is that you may receive another in its stead that, under the appearance of good, will cause you to fall, and you who began in the spirit will end in the flesh.⁴⁵ Do you forget that Satan often transforms himself into an angel of light?⁴⁶ God is Wisdom, and he wills to be loved not only sweetly but wisely; as St Paul says: "Let your service be one that is worthy of thinking beings."⁴⁷ For if you neglect knowledge, the spirit of error will lead you astray effortlessly by means of your own zeal. The cunning enemy has no more effective stratagem for robbing the heart of love than to induce a man to indulge it rashly and unreasonably. Hence I intend to provide you with certain rules of conduct whose observance should benefit those who love God. But the time has come to end this sermon, so tomorrow, if God gives me life and the leisure to speak to you, I shall attempt to explain those things which we have yet to consider. For then, refreshed by the night's rest, and, most important of all, having prayed, we shall assemble with greater eagerness, as is right, for a sermon on love, by the favor of our Lord, Jesus Christ, to whom be honor and glory for evermore.⁴⁸ Amen.

43. Deut 8:6, etc.

46. 2 Cor 11:14.

44. Neh 9:20.

47. Rom 12:1.

45. Gal 3:3.

48. Rom 16:27.

SERMON 20

THREE QUALITIES OF LOVE

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN with a word from St Paul: "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus, let him be anathema."¹ Truly, I ought to love the one through whom I have my being, my life, my understanding. If I am ungrateful, I am unworthy too. Lord Jesus, whoever refuses to live for you is clearly worthy of death, and is in fact dead already. Whoever does not know you is a fool. And whoever wants to become something without you, without doubt that man is considered nothing and is just that. For what is man, unless you take notice of him?² You have made all things for yourself, O God, and whoever wants to live for himself and not for you, in all that he does, is nothing. "Fear God, and keep his commandments," it is said, "for this is the whole duty of man."³ So if this is all, without this, man is nothing. Turn toward yourself, O God, this little that you have granted me to be; take from this miserable life, I beg you, the years that remain.⁴ In place of all that I lost in my evil way of living, O God, do not refuse a humble and penitent heart.⁵ My days have lengthened like a shadow and passed without fruit.⁶ I cannot bring them back, but let it please you at least if I offer them to you in the bitterness of my soul.⁷ As for wisdom—my every desire and intention is before you⁸—if there

1. 1 Cor 16:22. This Twentieth Sermon was translated by one of the editors, Edward John Mullaney OCSO.

2. Ps 143:3.

3. Eccles 12:13.

4. Is 38:10.

5. Ps 50:19.

6. Ps 101:12.

7. Is 38:15.

8. Ps 37:10.

were any in me, I would keep it for you. But, God, you know my stupidity,⁹ unless perhaps it is wisdom for me to recognize it, and even this is your gift. Grant me more; not that I am ungrateful for this small gift, but that I am eager for what is lacking. For all these things, and as much as I am able, I love you.

2. But there is something else that moves me, arouses and enflames me even more. Good Jesus, the chalice you drank, the price of our redemption, makes me love you more than all the rest. This alone would be enough to claim our love. This, I say, is what wins our love so sweetly, justly demands it, firmly binds it, deeply affects it. Our Savior had to toil so hard in this, in fact in making the whole world the Creator did not labor so much. Then he spoke and they were made; he commanded and they were created.¹⁰ But in saving us he had to endure men who contradicted his words, criticized his actions, ridiculed his sufferings, and mocked his death. See how much he loved us. Add to this the fact that he was not returning love but freely offering it. For who had given him anything first, that it should be returned to him? As St John said: "Not that we had loved him, but that he first loved us."¹¹ He loved us even before we existed, and in addition he loved us when we resisted him. According to the witness of St Paul: "Even when we were still his enemies we were reconciled to God through the blood of his Son."¹² If he had not loved his enemies, he could not have had any friends, just as he would have had no one to love if he had not loved those who were not.

II. 3. His love was sweet, and wise, and strong. I call it sweet because he took on a human body, wise because he avoided sin, strong because he endured death. Even though he took a body, his love was never sensual, but always in the wisdom of the Spirit. "A Spirit before our face is Christ the Lord,"¹³ jealous of us but with the jealousy of God,¹⁴ not man, and certainly not like that of the first man, Adam, for Eve. So those whom he sought after in a

9. Ps 68:5.

12. Rom 5:10.

10. Ps 32:9; 148:5.

13. Lam 4:20.

11. 1 Jn 4:10.

14. 2 Cor 11:2.

body, he loved in the spirit and redeemed in power. How sweet it is to see as man the Creator of humanity. While he carefully protected nature from sin, he forcefully drove death from that nature also. In taking a body he stooped to me, in avoiding sin he took counsel with himself, in accepting death he satisfied the Father. A dear friend, a wise counselor, a strong helper. Should I not willingly entrust myself to the one who had the good will, the wisdom, the strength to save me? He sought me out, he called me through grace;¹⁵ will he refuse me as I come to him?¹⁶ I fear neither force nor fraud which can snatch me from his hand.¹⁷ He is the one who conquered all things, even death, and tricked the serpent, the seducer of the world, with a holy deception. He was more prudent than the one, more powerful than the other. He took to himself a true body but only the likeness of sin,¹⁸ giving a sweet consolation to weak men in the one and in the other hiding a trap to deceive the devil. To reconcile us to the Father he bravely suffered death and conquered it, pouring out his blood as the price of our redemption.¹⁹ His divine majesty would not have sought me in chains unless he had loved me so tenderly, but he added wisdom to his affection by which he deceived the serpent. Then he added patience with which to appease his divine Father who had been offended.

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

4. Christian, learn from Christ how you ought to love Christ. Learn a love that is tender, wise, strong; love with tenderness, not passion, wisdom, not foolishness, and strength, lest you become weary and turn away from the love of the Lord. Do not let the glory of the world or the pleasure of the flesh lead you astray; the wisdom of Christ should become sweeter to you than these. The light of Christ should shine so much for you that the spirit of lies and deceit will not seduce you. Finally, Christ as the strength of

15. Rom 8:30.

18. Rom 8:3.

16. Jn 6:37.

19. Ps 48:9.

17. Job 10:7.

God should support you so that you may not be worn down by difficulties.²⁰ Let love enkindle your zeal, let knowledge inform it, let constancy strengthen it. Keep it fervent, discreet, courageous. See it is not tepid, or temerarious, or timid. See for yourself if those three commands are not prescribed in the law when God says: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole strength."²¹ It seems to me, if no more suitable meaning for this triple distinction comes to mind, that the love of the heart relates to a certain warmth of affection, the love of the soul to energy or judgment of reason, and the love of strength can refer to constancy and vigor of spirit. So love the Lord your God with the full and deep affection of your heart, love him with your mind wholly awake and discreet, love him with all your strength, so much so that you would not even fear to die for love of him. As it is written: "For love is strong as death, jealousy is bitter as hell."²² Your affection for your Lord Jesus should be both tender and intimate, to oppose the sweet enticements of sensual life. Sweetness conquers sweetness as one nail drives out another. No less than this keep him as a strong light for your mind and a guide for your intellect, not only to avoid the deceits of heresy and to preserve the purity of your faith from their seductions, but also that you might carefully avoid an indiscreet and excessive vehemence in your conversation. Let your love be strong and constant, neither yielding to fear nor cowering at hard work. Let us love affectionately, discreetly, intensely. We know that the love of the heart, which we have said is affectionate, is sweet indeed, but liable to be led astray if it lacks the love of the soul. And the love of the soul is wise indeed, but fragile without that love which is called the love of strength.

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

20. 1 Cor 1:24.

21. Deut 6:5.

22. Song 8:6.

going to the Father.”²³ How can he say this? Didn’t they love him when his departure made them so sad? In a way they loved him, and in another way they did not. Their love was more tender than prudent, it was sensual but not reasonable; they loved with the whole heart but not with the whole soul. What they loved was not for their own welfare, and so he said to them: “It is good for you that I am going,”²⁴ correcting not their feelings but their foresight. When he was speaking in the same way about his approaching death, Peter who loved him so dearly, tried to stand in the way.²⁵ When, as you remember, he rebuked him, what was it but his imprudence that he was correcting? Finally what did he mean in saying: “You do not mind the things of God,”²⁶ except: you do not love wisely, you are following your human feeling in opposition to the divine plan. He even called him Satan because although it was in ignorance, he was impeding salvation in trying to prevent the Savior’s death. Peter, who had been corrected, later when the sad prophecy was repeated, no longer objected to death but promised he would die with him.²⁷ But he could not fulfill this promise because he had not yet reached that third degree where he would love with all his strength. Taught to love with his whole soul, Peter was still weak. He was well instructed but not well prepared, aware of the mystery but afraid of bearing witness to it. Obviously that love was not as strong as death which still yielded before it.²⁸ Later, robed with strength from on high according to the promise of Jesus Christ,²⁹ Peter began to love with such strength that when forbidden by the Council to proclaim the holy Name, he boldly answered those who gave the order: “We must obey God rather than men.”³⁰ Then finally he attained the fullness of love, when for love’s sake he would not spare even his own life. Truly “greater love than this no man has, than that he lay down his life for his friends.”³¹ Even if Peter did not actually surrender his life then, he did offer it.

23. Jn 14:28.

26. Mk 8:33.

29. Lk 24:49.

24. Jn 16:7.

27. Mk 14:31.

30. Acts 5:29.

25. Mk 8:31-32.

28. Song 8:6.

31. Jn 15:13.

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

6. Notice that the love of the heart is, in a certain sense, carnal, because our hearts are attracted most toward the humanity of Christ and the things he did or commanded while in the flesh. The heart that is filled with this love is quickly touched by every word on this subject. Nothing else is as pleasant to listen to, or is read with as much interest, nothing is as frequently in remembrance or as sweet in reflection. The soul prepares the holocausts of its prayers with this love as if they were the fattened offerings of bullocks. The soul at prayer should have before it a sacred image of the God-man, in his birth or infancy or as he was teaching, or dying, or rising, or ascending. Whatever form it takes this image must bind the soul with the love of virtue and expel carnal vices, eliminate temptations and quiet desires. I think this is the principal reason why the invisible God willed to be seen in the flesh and to converse with men as a man. He wanted to recapture the affections of carnal men who were unable to love in any other way, by first drawing them to the salutary love of his own humanity, and then gradually to raise them to a spiritual love. Were they not at just this level when they said: "See, we have left everything and have followed you"?³² It was only by the love of his physical presence that they had left everything. They could not even bear to hear a word of his approaching passion and death, although this was to be their salvation. Even after it had all happened they could not gaze upon the glory of his ascension without deep sorrow. This is why Christ said to them: "Because I have said this to you sadness has filled your hearts."³³ So it was only by his physical presence that their hearts were detached from carnal loves.

7. Afterwards he showed them a higher degree of love when he said, "It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing."³⁴ I think Paul had reached this level when he said: "Even if we once knew Christ in the body, we know him thus no longer."³⁵ Perhaps

32. Mt 19:27.

33. Jn 16:6.

34. Jn 6:64.

35. 2 Cor 5:16.

this was also true of the Prophet who said: "A Spirit before our face is Christ the Lord."³⁶ When he adds: "Under his shadow we will live among the heathens,"³⁷ he seems to me to speak on behalf of the beginners, in order that they may at least rest in the shade since they know they are not strong enough to bear the heat of the sun. They may be nourished by the sweetness of his humanity since they are not yet able to perceive the things which are of the Spirit of God.³⁸ The shade of Christ, I suggest, is his flesh which overshadowed Mary and tempered for her the bright splendor of the Spirit.³⁹ Therefore in this human devotion there is in the meantime consolation for whomever does not as yet have the Spirit which gives life, at least who do not have him in the same way as those who say: "A Spirit before our face is Christ the Lord,"⁴⁰ and again: "If we once knew Christ in the flesh we know him thus no longer."⁴¹ For there is no love of Christ at all without the Holy Spirit, even if this love is in the flesh, and without its fullness. The measure of such love is this: its sweetness seizes the whole heart, and draws it completely from the love of all flesh and every sensual pleasure. Really this is what it means to love with the whole heart. If I prefer to the humanity of my Lord someone joined to me by ties of blood, or some sensual pleasure, this would obviously prove that I do not love with my whole heart since it is divided between its own interests and the love of the one who taught me as a man, both by his words and examples. Would I not seem to give my love partly to him and partly to my own? As he once said: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."⁴² To put it briefly, to love with the whole heart means to put the love of his sacred humanity before everything that tempts us, from within or without. Among these temptations we must also count the glory of the world, because its glory is that of the flesh, and those who delight in it without a doubt are men of the flesh.

36. Lam 4:20.

39. Lk 1:35.

42. Mt 10:37.

37. *Ibid.*

40. Lam 4:20.

38. 1 Cor 2:14.

41. 2 Cor 5:16.

8. Of course this devotion to the humanity of Christ is a gift, a great gift of the Spirit. I have called it carnal with comparison to that other love which does not know the Word as flesh so much as the Word as wisdom, as justice, truth, holiness, loyalty, strength, and whatever else could be said in this manner. Christ is truly all these things. "He became for us the wisdom of God, and justice, and sanctification and redemption."⁴³ Take as an example two men: one of them feels a share in Christ's sufferings, is affected and easily moved at the thought of all that he suffered; he is nourished and strengthened by the sweetness of this devotion to good and honest and worthy actions. But the other is always aflame with zeal for justice, eager for the truth and for wisdom. His life, his habits are saintly, ashamed of boasting, avoiding criticism, never knowing envy, hating pride. He not only flees all human glory but shrinks from it and avoids it, every stain of impurity both in body and soul he loathes and eradicates; finally he spurns every evil as if naturally, and embraces what is good. If you would compare the feelings of these two men would it not appear how the latter was superior in respect to the former, whose love was somehow more carnal?

9. But that carnal love is worthwhile since through it sensual love is excluded, and the world is condemned and conquered. It becomes better when it is rational, and becomes perfect when it is spiritual. Actually it is rational when the reason is so strong in faith that in all things concerning Christ it strays in not even the slightest degree because of any false likeness of truth, nor by any heretical or diabolical deceit does it wander from the integrity of the sense of the Church. In the same way when speaking on its own it exercises such caution as never to exceed the proper limits of discretion by superstition or frivolity or the vehemence of a too eager spirit. This is loving God with the whole soul, as we said before.⁴⁴ If, with the help of the Spirit, the soul attains such strength that it remains steadfast no matter what the effort or difficulty, if the fear of death itself cannot make it act unjustly, but even then it loves

43. I Cor 1:30.

44. Above, nn. 4f.

with the whole strength, this then is spiritual love. I think the name is very fitting for this special love because of the special fullness of the Spirit in which it excels. This is enough for those words of the bride: "Therefore the young maidens love you so much."⁴⁵ In those things that are to follow may he open to us the treasure of his mercy, the one who guards them, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

45. Song 1:2.

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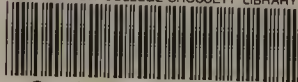
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