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THE WORKS OF  
SAINT AUGUSTINE

*A Translation  
for the 21st Century*

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# SERMONS

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***SERMONS***

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**A Translation for the 21st Century**

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**THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE**  
A Translation for the 21st Century

# **SERMONS**

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on the Saints

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Edmund Hill, O.P.

*editor*  
John E. Rotelle, O.S.A.

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# *Sermons*



## SERMON 273

ON THE BIRTHDAY<sup>1</sup> OF THE MARTYRS, FRUCTUOSUS, BISHOP, AND AUGURIUS  
AND EULOGIUS, DEACONS

*Date: 396<sup>2</sup>*

*Christ gave his martyrs an example to follow*

1. The Lord Jesus not only gave his martyrs their instructions, he also strengthened them by his example. I mean, that they might have something to follow when they were about to suffer, he first suffered for them; he pointed out the journey to be made, he made the road<sup>3</sup> along which to make it.

Death comes either to the soul or the body. But the soul cannot die, and it can die; it cannot die, because its consciousness is never lost; but it can die, if it loses God. You see, just as the soul itself is the life of the body, so in the same way God is the life of the soul. So, as the body dies when the soul abandons it, that is its life, in the same way when God abandons it the soul dies. To make sure, however, that God does not abandon the soul, it must always have enough faith not to fear death for God's sake; and then it isn't abandoned by God, and doesn't die.

So it remains that the death which is feared, is feared for the body. But even on this point the Lord Christ reassured his martyrs. After all, how could they be unsure of the integrity of their bodies, when they had been reassured about the number of their hairs? *Your hairs*, he said, *have all been counted* (Mt 10:30; Lk 12:7). In another place he says even more plainly, *For I tell you, that not a hair of your head shall perish* (Lk 21:18). Truth speaks, does weakness hesitate?

*A remark of the bishop Fructuosus*

2. Blessed are the saints in whose memory we are celebrating the day they suffered on; they have received an eternal crown, immortality without end, in exchange for temporal well-being; in these solemn celebrations they have left us lessons of encouragement. When we hear how the martyrs suffered, we rejoice and glorify God in them, nor do we grieve because they are dead. Even if they hadn't died for Christ, would they still be alive today? Why should confession of faith not do what sickness would eventually do in any case?

You heard the interrogations of the persecutors, you heard the replies of the confessors, when the passion of these saints was being read. Among other things, what was that remark of the blessed Fructuosus the bishop? When someone spoke to him, and asked him to keep him in mind and pray for him, he answered, "I have to pray for the Catholic Church, spread as it is from the east to the west." Who, after all, can pray for every single individual? But the one who prays for all doesn't overlook any single individual. No individual member is passed over by one whose prayers are poured out for the whole body. So what advice do you think he was giving this man who asked him to pray for him? What's your opinion? Undoubtedly you know what I'm getting at. I'm just reminding you. He asked him to pray for him. "And I," he said, "am praying for the Catholic Church, spread as it is from east to west. Don't you, if you want me to pray for you, withdraw from the Church for which I am praying."<sup>4</sup>

*Reply of the deacon Eulogius: God alone is to be worshiped,  
not other martyrs or saints*

3. What kind of remark, too, was that of the holy deacon, who suffered and was crowned with his bishop? The judge said to him, "Do you too worship Fructuosus?"<sup>5</sup> And he answered, "I do not worship Fructuosus, but I worship God, whom Fructuosus also worships." In this way he admonished us to honor the martyrs, and with the martyrs to worship God.

After all, we ought not to be the sort of people we grieve over the pagans for being. And indeed, they do worship dead human beings. As a matter of fact, all those whose names you hear, for whom temples have been built, were human beings; and in human affairs several of them, practically all of them indeed, exercised royal power. You hear of Jupiter, you hear of Hercules, you hear of Neptune, you hear of Pluto, Mercury, Liber, and the rest; they were all men.<sup>6</sup> This is stated in national histories, as well as in the tales of the poets. Those who have read them know this; those who haven't, should believe those who have.

So those men, by conferring temporal benefits of some kind or other on mankind, managed human affairs to their own credit, and began to be worshiped in such a way, by empty-headed people pursuing empty goals, as to be called gods, to be regarded as gods; to have temples built for them as gods, to be prayed to as gods, to have altars set up to them as gods, priests ordained for them as gods, victims sacrificed to them as gods.

*Only the true God ought to have a temple or be offered sacrifice*

4. But only the true God ought to have a temple, only to the true God should sacrifice be offered. So these things which are fittingly and correctly owed to the one true God, wretched humanity was seduced into offering to many false gods. Human wretchedness, as a result, was haunted by a perverse error; as a result, the minds of all humanity were laid low, and battered on by the devil. But when the Savior's grace and God's mercy finally looked kindly on unworthy



humanity, what had been prophetically foretold in the Song of Songs was fulfilled: *Get up, North Wind; and come, South Wind, and breathe upon my garden, and the scents will flow* (Sg 4:16).

As much as to say, "Get up and be off, North Wind!" The North, after all, is the cold part of the world. Under the devil souls have grown cold as under the North Wind, and having lost the warmth of charity, they have turned to ice.<sup>7</sup> But what is he told? "*Get up and be off, North Wind! You've battened on them long enough, possessed them long enough, crouched long enough over their prostrate forms. Get up and be off!*" "*Come, South Wind, wind from the region of light and warmth; And breathe upon my garden, and the scents will flow.*" These scents were being read to us just a moment ago.

*The saints and martyrs are the sweet smelling scents*

5. What are these scents? The ones about which the Lord's bride herself says, *We will run after the odor of your ointments* (Sg 1:3). Recalling this odor, the apostle Paul says, *We are the good odor of Christ in every place, both in those who are being saved, and in those who are being lost. A great mystery.<sup>8</sup> We are the good odor of Christ in every place, both in those who are being saved, and in those who are being lost. For some indeed the odor of life unto life, for some the odor of death unto death. And for understanding these things, who is sufficient?* (2 Cor 2:14-16).

How can a good odor animate some, kill others? A good odor, not a bad one. You see, he didn't say, "For some indeed we are a good odor unto life, for others a bad odor unto death." He didn't say that, but, *We are the good odor of Christ in every place.* Woe to the wretches who are slain by a good odor! So if you are a good odor, Paul, why does this odor slay some, animate others? That it should animate some I hear, I understand; that it should slay others, I find it difficult to follow; especially because you said, *And for this who is sufficient?* It's not surprising that we are not sufficient; may the one whose odor the man was of whom we are speaking make us sufficient.

The apostle, after all, promptly answers me, "Understand the meaning of, *We are the good odor of Christ in every place, both for those who are being saved and for those who are being lost. All the same, we are a good odor, for some the odor of life unto life, for others the odor of death unto death.* This odor animates the loving, kills the envious. You see, if there were no glory for the saints, no feelings of envy would arise in the ungodly. That's how the odor of the saints began to suffer persecution; but like jars of ointment, the more they were broken, the further spread the sweet odor."<sup>9</sup>

*Pagan gods cannot be compared even to ordinary Christians*

6. Blessed are those whose passion has been related; blessed too is Saint Agnes, who also suffered on this same day;<sup>10</sup> a virgin who was what she was called. Agnes means "lamb" in Latin, "chaste" in Greek. She was what she was

called; she was deservedly rewarded with a martyr's crown. So then what, my brothers and sisters, what am I to say to you about those men whom the pagans have worshiped as gods, for whom they have instituted temples, priesthoods, altars, sacrifices? What am I to say to you? That they are not to be compared to our martyrs? Even that's an insult, that I should so much as say it. God forbid that those impious people should be compared to any of the faithful at all, however weak, however worldly still, and needing to be nurtured on milk, not solid food.<sup>11</sup>

What's Juno worth, as against one little old faithful Christian woman? As against one weak old Christian man, trembling in all his limbs, what's Hercules worth? Yes, he overcame Cacus, Hercules overcame the lion, Hercules overcame the hound Cerberus;<sup>12</sup> Fructuosus<sup>13</sup> overcame the whole world. Compare a man with a man. Agnes, a thirteen-year-old girl, overcame the devil. This girl defeated the one who deceived so many about Hercules.

*We do not worship our martyrs as gods*

7. And yet, dearly beloved, while those gods are in no way at all to be compared to our martyrs, we don't regard our martyrs as gods, or worship them as gods. We don't provide them with temples, with altars, with sacrifices. Priests don't make offerings to them; perish the thought! These things are provided for God; or rather these things are offered to God, by whom all things are provided for us. Even when we make the offering<sup>14</sup> at the shrines of the holy martyrs, don't we offer it to God? The holy martyrs have their place of honor. Notice, please; in the recitation of names at the altar of Christ, their names are recited in the most honored place;<sup>15</sup> but for all that, they are not worshiped instead of Christ.

When did you ever hear it said by me at the shrine of Saint Theogenes,<sup>16</sup> or by any of my brethren and colleagues, or by any priest, "I am offering to you, Saint Theogenes"? Or, "I am offering to you, Peter," or "I am offering to you, Paul"? You never did; it doesn't happen, it is not permitted. And if you should be asked, "Do you, then, worship Peter?" answer what Eulogius answered about Fructuosus: "I do not worship Peter, but I worship God, whom Peter also worships." Then Peter loves you. Because if you want to treat Peter as God, you stumble over the rock, and take care you don't break your foot by stumbling over the rock.

*The example of Paul and Barnabas, horrified at being taken for gods*

8. To show you that what I'm saying is true, let me urge you to listen to this. In the Acts of the Apostles, when the apostle Paul had performed a great miracle in Lycaonia, the citizens of that region or province imagined that gods had come down to them, and thought Barnabas was Jupiter, while Paul was Mercury, because he was the readiest speaker. With these thoughts they brought garlands<sup>17</sup> and victims, and proposed to offer them sacrifice. Their immediate reaction was

not amusement but horror; at once they tore their garments and said to the people, *Brothers, what are you doing? We too, just like you, are men who can suffer; but we are proclaiming the true God to you. Be converted from these vain ways* (Acts 14:10-14). You see how the saints were horrified at being worshiped for gods.

Again, blessed John the evangelist, who wrote the Apocalypse, astounded at the wonderful things that were being shown him, in one place was so awe struck that he fell at the feet of the angel, by whom it was all being pointed out to him. But the angel, whom no mere man can be compared with, said to him, *Get up; what are you doing? Adore God. I, you see, am the fellow servant of you and your brothers* (Rv 19:10).

The martyrs hate your flagons, the martyrs hate your roasting pans,<sup>18</sup> the martyrs hate your drunken revels. I am saying this without wishing to insult those who are not that sort; those who do such things can apply what I'm saying to themselves. The martyrs hate these things, they don't love those who go in for them. But they hate it much more if they are themselves worshiped.

*The martyrs were human, just like us*

9. Therefore, dearly beloved, exult and rejoice on the days of the holy martyrs; pray that you may be able to follow in the footsteps of the martyrs. It isn't, after all, the case that you are human beings and they weren't; not, after all, the case that you were born, and they were born quite differently; I mean, they didn't carry around flesh of a different kind from what you do. We are all from Adam, we are all trying to be in Christ.

Our Lord himself, the very head of the Church, the only-begotten Son of God, the Word of the Father through which all things were made, did not have flesh of a different kind from ours. That's why he wished to take on a man from the virgin, to be born in the flesh from one of the human race. I mean, if he had made himself a body from somewhere else, who would believe that he carried the same flesh as we do? And yet he had flesh *in the likeness of the flesh of sin* (Rom 8:3), we have the flesh of sin. After all, he did not spring from male seed, or from the lust of male and female; but from what? From a message of the Father. And yet, though he was born in a marvelous way, he was willing to be born mortal, and to die for us, and to redeem us with his blood, insofar as he was a man.

Notice what I'm saying, brothers and sisters: even Christ himself, though he is God, though he is one God with the Father, though he is the Word of the Father, only-begotten, equal and coeternal with the Father; yet insofar as he was prepared to be a man, he preferred to be called a priest rather than to require a priest's services; he preferred to be a sacrifice rather than to demand sacrifice, insofar as he is a man. Because insofar as he is God, everything that is owed to the Father is also owed to the only-begotten Son. For that reason, dearly beloved, venerate the martyrs, praise, love, proclaim, honor them. But worship the God of the martyrs.

Turning to the Lord, etc.

## NOTES

1. That is, the day of their martyrdom, when they were born again into the eternal life of the kingdom.

2. So all the authorities; as Augustine tells us that the feast of these martyrs coincided with that of Saint Agnes, the actual day was 21 January. Fructuosus was bishop of Tarragona in Spain, martyred in 259 under the Emperors Gallienus and Valerian, together with—or perhaps a few days before—his deacons Augurius and Eulogius. See note 5 below. From section 7 it seems probable that the martyrs were being celebrated at the *memoria* of Theogenes, because they would not have their own *memoria* in Hippo Regius. And perhaps Theogenes was chosen as he, the first known bishop of Hippo Regius, may well have been martyred during the same persecution.

3. Himself and his example; see Jn 14:6.

4. The lesson Augustine draws, of course, from the martyr's remark, obviously having the Donatists in mind. Fructuosus was naturally not thinking about them.

5. Does this indicate that Fructuosus was martyred at least a few days before his deacons? I doubt if it would have occurred to the judge that the deacon would worship a still living man.

6. This simplistic, and quite incorrect explanation of pagan polytheism is derived from Wis 14:12-17. It may well be true for demi-gods like Hercules, who in Africa, however, seems to have replaced Apollo as the sun god. See Sermon 24, note 34. Liber is the Latin name for Dionysus, the god of wine.

7. See Mt 24:12.

8. *Sacramentum*.

9. See Mk 14:3; Jn 12:3.

10. 21 January; not in the same year.

11. See 1 Cor 3:1-2.

12. Cacus was a monstrous semi-human giant (Virgil, *Aeneid*, VIII, 194.198), son of Vulcan, who had been foolish enough to steal some cattle from Hercules. He lived in a cave on the Aventine, one of the seven hills of what would later be Rome, where the beautiful church of Santa Sabina now stands, the headquarters of the Dominican Order. The story is told in that book, lines 184-280. Cerberus was the three-headed hound who guarded the entrance to Hades (*Aeneid*, VI, 417; VIII, 296-297); in the same passage the Nemean lion is mentioned too as one of Hercules' exploits. Augustine probably mentions Juno and Hercules together, because Hercules was the son of Jupiter by one of his innumerable human lady loves, and by that very fact incurred the formidable hostility of Juno, Jupiter's lawful divine wife; and she was responsible for enslaving him to Eurystheus, king of Argos, who set him all these impossible tasks, which being superhuman he achieved.

13. Was he the weak old Christian man Augustine had in mind?

14. That is, when we celebrate Mass.

15. In the eucharistic prayer itself.

16. See Sermon 272B, note 11. This is the indication, not absolutely conclusive, of course, that Saint Fructuosus and his companions were being honored at the *memoria* of Saint Theogenes; as his guests, so to say.

17. The ritual garlands with which sacrificial victims were adorned.

18. Sacred vessels, presumably, used in pagan rites; but reminiscent, I suspect, of some instruments of torture, like Saint Lawrence's gridiron, employed in executing martyrs. See 2 Mc 7:3-6, which may well have been at the back of Augustine's mind here.

## SERMON 274

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYR VINCENT

Date: 410<sup>1</sup>

*Vincent victorious in every way*

We have been watching a magnificent spectacle with the eyes of faith, the holy martyr Vincent everywhere victorious.<sup>2</sup> He was victorious in his words, victorious in the pains he endured; victorious in his confession, victorious in his tribulations; victorious when burned with fire, victorious when submerged in the waves.<sup>3</sup> When his flesh, which was a kind of tribute to the victorious Christ, was thrown into the sea from the boat, it silently said, *We are cast down, but not lost* (2 Cor 4:9). Who can have endowed his soldier with such patience, but the one who first shed his blood for him? The one to whom it says in the psalm, *Since you are my patience, Lord; Lord, my hope from my youth* (Ps 71:5). A great contest earns great glory; not human or temporal glory, but divine and eternal. Faith is doing battle; and when faith is doing battle, nobody can overthrow the flesh.<sup>4</sup> Because even if it is mangled and torn to shreds, when can anyone perish who has been redeemed by the blood of Christ? A powerful man cannot lose what he has bought with his gold, and can Christ lose what he bought with his blood?

But this must all be referred to the glory, not of man, but of God. It's from him that patience truly comes, true patience, holy patience, religious patience, right patience; Christian patience is a gift of God.<sup>5</sup> I mean, many bandits endure torture with the greatest patience; and by not giving in, by overcoming the torturer,<sup>6</sup> they go on to be punished in eternal flames. It's the cause that distinguishes the martyr from the patience, or rather the obduracy, of criminals. Equal punishment, but a very unequal cause. We have just been singing in the words of the martyrs—Vincent, you see, had used them in his prayers—*Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from an unholy nation* (Ps 43:1). His cause was distinguished, because he contended for the truth, for justice, for God, for Christ, for the faith, for the unity of the Church, for undivided charity.

Who endowed him with such patience? Who? Let the psalm tell us. There, after all, we can read, there we can sing, *Shall my soul not be subject to God? For it is from him that my patience comes* (Ps 62:1). Whoever imagines that

Saint Vincent was capable of these things by his own powers is making too big a mistake altogether. Those, you see, who are confident they are capable of this by their own powers, may seem to overcome<sup>7</sup> by patience, but are in fact being overcome by pride.

Overcoming well means overcoming all the machinations of the devil.<sup>8</sup> He serves up enticements, he is overcome by self-restraint; he inflicts pains and tortures, he is overcome by patience; he suggests errors, he is overcome by wisdom. As a last resort, when all these ploys have been defeated, he suggests to the soul, “Well done, well done, how much you’ve been able to do! How valiantly you’ve contended! Who can be compared with you? How well you have overcome!” The holy soul must answer him, *Let them be put to confusion and shame, those who say to me, Well done, well done!* (Ps 70:3). So when do you overcome, if not when you say, *It is in the Lord that my soul shall be praised; let the gentle hear, and rejoice* (Ps 34:2)?

The gentle, you see, know what I’m talking about, because the Word dwells in them, his example dwells in them. Those who are not gentle can’t savor the meaning of what’s said here, *It is in the Lord that my soul shall be praised*. If you are not gentle, I mean, you are proud, rough, with a good opinion of yourself, wanting to be praised in yourself, not in the Lord. Those, on the other hand, who say *It is in the Lord that my soul shall be praised*, don’t say, “Let the nations hear and rejoice; let people hear and rejoice,” but *Let the gentle hear and rejoice*. Christ, after all, was gentle; *like a sheep he was led to the slaughter* (Is 53:7). That’s how he was gentle; because he was led like a sheep to the slaughter. *Let the gentle hear and rejoice*, because they can savor the meaning of what is said: *Taste and see that the Lord is sweet; blessed is the man who hopes in him* (Ps 34:8).

We heard a long reading; it’s a short day.<sup>9</sup> I, for my part, must not take advantage of your patience with a long sermon. I know that you have been listening patiently, and it’s as if by standing and listening for a long time you have been suffering and sympathizing with the martyr. May the one who listens to you love you and reward you with a crown.

## NOTES

1. This precise date is suggested by de Gaiffier, who assigns the next two sermons to the next two years. Saint Vincent’s feast day was, and is, 22 January. He was a deacon of Saragossa, Spain, and was martyred in Valencia in 303, in the persecution launched by Diocletian.

2. Playing on the martyr’s name: *Vincentium ubique vincentem*. We have been watching the spectacle of his martyrdom by listening to his Acts, the narrative of his passion.

3. This was not one of the tortures he endured, like the fire. But when he was dead, the governor, according to the legend, had his body dumped in the sea, weighed down by a big stone. But it miraculously came ashore and its whereabouts was revealed to Christians.

4. An untranslatable play on words: *quando fides pugnata, carnem nullus expugnat*.

5. "Patience" in English is really too weak a word for the power of endurance that he is considering here, meaning little more, for the most part, than a capacity to wait in queues and traffic jams without becoming irritable, or to put up with the tiresome behavior of children. But we have to keep it, I think, if only because of the psalm text.

6. Who is trying to extract a confession from them, and the names of accomplices; normal Roman judicial procedure.

7. *Vincere*, playing, of course, on Vincent's name.

8. Supplying *diaboli*, which is clearly intended, but seems to have slipped out of the text, which simply runs, *universas machinas vincere*. The *machinas* also contain an allusion, probably, to the instruments of torture.

9. It was the middle of winter.

## SERMON 275

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYR VINCENT

Date: 411<sup>1</sup>

*It is the cause, not the punishment, that distinguishes the martyrs*

1. Our spirits have just taken in a great and very marvelous spectacle; it was not a wholly vain and pernicious pleasure that we derived from it, such as is usual in the theaters with all their tinsel triviality, but plainly a most useful and fruitful pleasure that we drank in with our inner eyes, when the glorious passion of blessed Vincent was being read. It was the pleasure of seeing the invincible soul of the martyr pitted in the fiercest conflict against the wiles of the ancient enemy, against the savagery of the impious judge, against the pains of the mortal flesh, and with the help of the Lord overcoming it all. That is plainly, my dearest friends, that is undoubtedly how it was; in the Lord let us praise this soul, that *the gentle may hear and rejoice* (Ps 34:2).

As the reading proceeded, it made clear what words he heard, what words he replied with, what torments he overcame, and practically placed before our very eyes everything that took place.<sup>2</sup> There was such pain in his limbs, such serene certainty in his words, that it was as if one person was being tortured, and another person speaking. And indeed it was; the Lord, after all, foretold this, and promised it to his martyrs when he said, *It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who is speaking in you* (Mt 10:20). So let it be in the Lord that this soul is praised. I mean, *what is man, unless he is mindful of him?* (Ps 8:4) Or what are the powers of dust, unless the one who made us out of dust comes to our help?<sup>3</sup> *So that whoever boasts, must boast in the Lord* (1 Cor 1:31).

After all, if the diabolical and misleading spirit can fill either false seers or his false martyrs in such a way that they either inflict torments on their own bodies themselves,<sup>4</sup> or make light of those inflicted on them; what's so great about the Lord our God, to confirm the preaching of his name, handing over indeed the flesh of the actual preachers into the hands of the persecutors, but taking up their minds into the very citadel of liberty, so that even while that is enduring iniquity, these are asserting the truth? This ensures that it is not just endurance that makes them victorious, but justice, since it is the cause, not the punishment, that distinguishes the martyrs.



Many people, after all, have endured pain out of pigheadedness rather than steadiness; by way of vice, not virtue; being perversely mistaken, not guided by right reason; with the devil their possessor, not their persecutor. In the case, though, of our victorious Vincent, it was indeed the one who possessed him that was victorious; but his possessor was the one who had thrown outside *the prince of this world* (Jn 12:31); the result being that he was defeated even when fighting outwardly,<sup>5</sup> having already been defeated and denied any mastery and control inwardly. To be sure, the one who has been thrown outside does not cease to *go around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1 Pt 5:8). But he is fought to a standstill on our behalf, by the one who reigns within us, after turning him out of us.

*It all hurt the devil more than it hurt Vincent*

2. In any case, the devil suffered greater torments from Vincent not being vanquished, than Vincent did from the devil persecuting him. The grimmer and the more meticulously planned those torments were, after all, the more the one being tortured triumphed over the torturer; and from that flesh, as from soil watered by his blood, a palm<sup>6</sup> was growing which caused the enemy more grief than ever. But he was raging unseen, and being defeated and afflicted unseen; so what the devil was suffering in secret appeared visibly in the man who was presiding; and that invisible adversary was given away through the tiny cracks in that little pot of his which he had filled, as it began to break up. The words of this man, surely, his eyes, his expression, the agitated movements of his whole body, all indicated how much more severe were the torments he was experiencing inwardly, than those which he was inflicting on the martyr outwardly.

If we consider the agitation of the torturer and the calmness of the one suffering the torments, it is very easy to see who succumbed to the pains, and who rose above them. What joy will be theirs when they reign in triumph, when they found so much as they died for truth? What will *the fountain of life* (Ps 36:9) be like with the body become imperishable, when the dew from it is so delicious amid the body's torments? And what will the eternal flames be doing to the godless, who are so devastated by the fury raging in their hearts? What are they going to suffer when they are judged, if they are so tormented when they judge? What authority will the future judgments of the saints possess, when in this life the martyr's scaffold turned the judge's bench upside down?

*God's care even for the mortal remains of the martyrs*

3. The Lord, though, bears striking witness to his witnesses,<sup>7</sup> when after stiffening<sup>8</sup> their hearts for the struggle, he does not abandon their bodies once they are dead, like the outstanding miracle he performed over the body of blessed Vincent. The enemy desired, and took all necessary steps to ensure that it should completely disappear,<sup>9</sup> but a divine sign gave its whereabouts away, and revealed it for religious burial and veneration so promptly, that it would

continue as a lasting memorial to the victory of piety and impiety's defeat. Indeed, *how precious in the sight of the Lord must be the death of his saints* (Ps 116:15), when not even the earth of the flesh is ignored after the life has gone out of it; and when, as the invisible soul withdraws from its visible home, this dwelling<sup>10</sup> of his servant is preserved by the Lord's care, and honored for the Lord's glory by his faithful fellow servants.

What, after all, is God doing, when he performs miracles in connection with the bodies of the departed saints, but bearing witness to the truth that what dies does not perish as far as he himself is concerned; and giving us to understand in what honor he must hold the souls of the slain, when their lifeless flesh is adorned with such a powerful mark of divinity? Just as the apostle, you see, speaking about the members of the Church, drew a likeness to them from the members of our bodies, since *as regards those parts of ours which are unseemly, we confer upon them more abundant honor* (1 Cor 12:23); in the same way the providence of the creator, by bestowing on the corpses of the martyrs the testimony of such outstanding miracles, confers more abundant honor on lifeless human remains; and where with the departure of life only something without form, so to say, is left, he there appears more evidently than ever as the present giver of life.

### NOTES

1. So de Gaiffier; see Sermon 274, note 1.
2. The passion of the martyr, as summarized in Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, 22 January, tells of a dialogue between the martyr and the governor, whose name was Dacian, presiding over his torture, which was, in law, his judicial examination.
3. See Gn 2:7; 3:19.
4. He is probably alluding to the priests of Cybele, and similar deities worshiped with orgiastic rites, who gashed themselves with knives, like the prophets of Baal in their contest with Elijah, 1 Kgs 18:28. But he may well have also been thinking of the Circumcellions, the fanatical Donatists who courted martyrdom, and sometimes inflicted it (as they imagined) on themselves; often by leaping over cliffs.
5. By instigating the torture of the martyr.
6. The emblem of victory.
7. "Martyr" means "witness."
8. Reading *erexit* with some manuscripts instead of the edited text's *rexit*, who governed their hearts.
9. By having it dumped in the sea, weighed down by a big stone.
10. The saint's body, dwelling of the saint, identified with his soul.

## SERMON 276

### ON THE FEAST OF THE MARTYR VINCENT

Date: 412<sup>1</sup>

*It is only in Christ that Vincent was victorious*

1. In the passion which we have had chanted to us today, my dearest brothers and sisters, we are clearly shown a ferocious judge, a bloodthirsty torturer, an unvanquished, invincible martyr. His body was so plowed up with various punishments that there were now no more torments left, and still his limbs endured. Though shown up by so many miracles, ungodliness still persisted; though harried by so many torments, weakness still refused to give in; let it be admitted, therefore, that divinity must have been at work. After all, how could perishable dust endure against such monstrous tortures, unless the Lord were dwelling in it? In all these events, you see, that one is to be acknowledged, that one glorified, that one praised, who gave him faith when he was first called, and when he suffered at the last gave him strength. Do you want to make sure that each is a gift? Listen to the apostle Paul: *To you, he says, has it been granted for Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him* (Phil 1:29).

Vincent<sup>2</sup> had received them both, he had received them, and he kept them. After all, if he hadn't received them, would he have had them?<sup>3</sup> But he did have faithfulness in his words, he did have endurance in his sufferings. So don't any of you be too self-assured when offering a word; don't be too confident in your own powers when suffering trials or temptations; because it is from him that we have the wisdom to speak good things wisely, from him the patience to endure bad things bravely. Call to mind the Lord Christ warning and encouraging his disciples in the gospel; call to mind the king of martyrs equipping his troops with spiritual weapons, indicating the wars to be fought, lending assistance, promising rewards; first saying to his disciples, *In this world you will have distress*; then immediately adding words that would allay their terrors: *But have confidence; I myself have vanquished the world* (Jn 16:33). So why should we be surprised, dearly beloved, if Vincent was victorious in him by whom the world was vanquished? *In this world, he says, you will have distress*; such that, even if it distresses, it cannot suppress and get you down; even if it knocks you down, it cannot knock you out.<sup>4</sup>

*The flesh was suffering, and the Spirit was speaking*

2. The world mounts a two-pronged attack on the soldiers of Christ. Notice carefully, brothers and sisters. It's a two-pronged attack, I repeat, that the world mounts against the soldiers of Christ. It wheedles, you see, in order to lead them astray; it terrifies, in order to break them. Let us not be held fast by our own pleasures, let us not be terrified by someone else's cruelty, and the world has been vanquished. Christ runs up to defend each approach, and the Christian is not vanquished.

If, in this passion of Vincent's, one only gave thought to human powers of endurance, it begins to look unbelievable; if one acknowledges divine power, it ceases even to be wonderful. Such hideous cruelty was being unleashed on the martyr's body, and such calm serenity being displayed in his voice; such harsh, savage punishments being applied to his limbs, such assurance echoing in his words, that we would have imagined that in a marvelous way, while Vincent was suffering, it was someone else, not the speaker, that was being tortured.<sup>5</sup>

And indeed, my dearest brothers and sisters, that's how it was; undoubtedly that's how it was; someone else was speaking. Christ, you see, promised even this to his witnesses in the gospel, when he was preparing them for this sort of contest. I mean, this is what he said: *Do not think beforehand about how or what you are to speak. For it is not you that are speaking, but the Spirit of my Father who is speaking in you* (Mt 10:19-20). So the flesh was suffering, and the Spirit was speaking. And while the Spirit was speaking, not only was ungodliness being confounded and convicted, but weakness was even being strengthened and comforted.

*Vincent the martyr did not suffer torments as bad as those that overwhelmed Dacian, his judge*

3. All those torments were making the martyr all the more glorious for us. Though pierced and gashed with such a multiple variety of wounds, he did not abandon the battlefield, but kept on coming back to it all the more hotly. You would think the flames were hardening him, not burning; and like a potter's kiln receiving the soft clay, were turning it into a hard tile. Our martyr was able to say to Dacian, "Now my flesh doesn't worry about your fires, because *my strength has been dried out like a tile* (Ps 22:15)."<sup>6</sup> And since it is very truly written, *The kiln tests the potter's vessels, and the trial of tribulation just men* (Sir 27:5), Vincent was tested and baked by that fire; Dacian, however, caught fire and cracked.

If he wasn't on fire, after all, where was the smoke coming from? What else, I mean, were his words of fury and ire, but smoke from a man on fire? So he was applying the flames outwardly to our martyr, whose heart was feeling cool and refreshed; while he himself, set alight by the firebrands of rage, was burning inwardly like an oven,<sup>7</sup> and burning up his lodger, the devil. Dacian's furious words, you see, his wild, crazy eyes, his threatening expression and the move-

ments of his whole body gave away that inner lodger of his, whose presence was betrayed by these visible signs, as by the chinks and cracks in this little pot of his which he had filled. He was being devastated by his fury much more than the martyr was being tormented by the flames.

*Vincent's worldwide fame after his martyrdom*

4. But now, brothers and sisters, all that is in the past, both the wrath of Dacian and the pains of Vincent. There remain, however, Dacian's pains and Vincent's crown. Finally, leaving all that aside, namely the matter of future rewards and punishments, let us demonstrate the glory of the martyrs even in this world. What region today, what province across the seas, wherever either the Roman Empire or the Christian name extends, is not delighted to celebrate the heavenly birthday of Vincent? Who today, on the other hand, would ever have heard of the name of Dacian, unless they had read it in the passion of Vincent? But that the Lord took such care to preserve the martyr's body, what else did that demonstrate, but that the one who did not abandon his lifeless remains had been guiding and directing him while he lived?

So Vincent vanquished Dacian while he lived, he vanquished him also when he was dead. Living he trampled on the torments, dead he swam across the sea. But the one who guided and steered the lifeless corpse through the waves, was the same one who had granted him an invincible spirit among the torturer's iron claws. The torturer's flames did not cow his heart, the waters of the sea did not sink his body. But all these things just go to show that *precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints* (Ps 116:15). To this glory may the Lord bring us too under his protection, whose is the honor and the empire for ever and ever. Amen.

### NOTES

1. So de Gaiffier; see Sermon 274, note 1. There are two editions of the text, with many little variations between them. I am unashamedly eclectic in which I translate. I will only mention the more significant variations in the notes.

2. The Maurists add "the Levite Vincent," meaning he was a deacon. But I don't think this assimilation of the Church's ordained ministry to the ancient Israelite levitical institution is characteristic of Augustine.

3. See 1 Cor 4:7.

4. Much more effective word play in the Latin: *ut si premit, non opprimat; si oppugnat, non expugnet*.

5. So the Maurist text: *ut putaremus, Vincentio patiente, alium non loquentem torqueri*. The other edition, followed by the text I am translating, runs: . . . *Vincentio patiente, alium aut certe alium loquente Vincentio torqueri*; which in my opinion will only make sense if it is emended to read, . . . *Vincentio patiente, alium loqui, aut certe alium loquente Vincentio torqueri*; that while

Vincent was suffering, someone else was speaking; or certainly that while Vincent was speaking, someone else was being tortured.

6. An appropriate psalm to quote in the circumstances; but the verse really means the opposite of the sense he gets from it.

7. Bakers' ovens in the Mediterranean countries are still, in country areas, heated by burning brushwood inside them. This is raked out when burned to ashes, and the loaves are put in on long wooden paddles.

## SERMON 277

ON THE FEAST OF THE MARTYR VINCENT  
PREACHED IN THE RESTORED BASILICA

*Date: 413<sup>1</sup>*

*With Vincent's body there was bestowed  
upon the Church a consoling memorial*

1. With the eyes of faith we have been looking out for<sup>2</sup> the martyr engaged in his struggle, and have loved him for his total and invisible beauty. What an absolutely lovely spirit, after all, must he have had, seeing that even his corpse was invincible and unvanquished! He confessed the Lord while still alive; he overcame the enemy even when he was dead. What are we to think about this, brothers and sisters? That when the providence and plans of the almighty creator conferred this honor even on a dead body,<sup>3</sup> it was bestowing anything on the martyr? Well what, when all is said and done? If it had not been buried, would he not have known where it could be resurrected from? No, there was kept for him both the crown of victory and the eternal life of the resurrection.

But with his body there was bestowed upon the Church a consoling memorial. God very often in this way bestows something on his servants by means of his servants, with a kind of gracious freedom granting what is of more benefit to the one to whom it is given, than to the one by whose means it is given. Thus God fed Saint Elijah by means of a bird; and his mercy and omnipotence did not fall short of being able always to feed him like that. All the same, he is sent to a widow to be fed; not because other means were lacking to support the servant of God, but in order that the faithful widow might win a blessing.<sup>4</sup> So God has bestowed the bodies of the saints on the Churches for memorials to pray at and as reminders to pray, not for monuments to the martyrs to give them glory.<sup>5</sup> They, after all, have their glory complete and intact in the presence of their creator. Nor are they afraid of anything happening to their bodies, since there is in fact nothing to fear. If they were to spare their bodies more,<sup>6</sup> they would be harming their bodies too; but if through faith they do not spare their bodies, they are doing their bodies a favor too.

*Denying Christ, you are denied by Christ*

2. Look, pay attention to this point, and interrogate your faith. If Saint Vincent, out of terror at the prospect of torture, were to deny Christ, he would appear to have spared his body; but because of his mortal condition he would sooner or later part from his body anyhow. What then would he do in the resurrection, when it would be hurled into everlasting fire? Denying Christ, you are denied by Christ. *Whoever denies me*, he says, *in the presence of men, I will deny him in the presence of my Father who is in heaven* (Mt 10:33). So look, he would deny him, the torturers would stop, and with his spirit wounded, his body would be safe and sound; or rather, with his spirit slain, his body would be alive. What advantage would a short life of the body be to him in eternity when he was dead?

The day would come, which the Lord mentions, *when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice, and come forth*; but with an important distinction. They will all come forth, but they won't all come forth to the same thing. They will all rise again, but not all of them to be changed.<sup>7</sup> Because *those who have done good*, he says, *to the resurrection of life; but those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment* (Jn 5:28-29). When he says *all who are in the tombs*, there can be no doubt he is indicating the resurrection of bodies. And when you hear the word *judgment*, don't kid yourself that he's talking about a temporal judgment; judgment stands for eternal punishment. It's in the same sense as this was said: *But whoever does not believe has already been judged* (Jn 3:18).

So this is the difference that is going to separate the just from the unjust, believers from unbelievers, those who confess Christ from those who deny him, the lovers of this fleeting life from the lovers of eternal life; this discrimination is going to separate them: *And the just will go to eternal life, the godless, though, into eternal fire* (Mt 25:46). In that fire those who spared the body will be tormented with the body; in sparing the body they denied Christ; in denying Christ they put off eternal punishment for a while for the body as well as for the soul. If they put it off, does that mean they put it away altogether?

*The martyrs did not despise their bodies,  
but took the best possible care of their interests*

3. So the martyrs of Christ, with prudent forethought, did not despise their bodies. This<sup>8</sup> is a perverse and worldly philosophy, professed by people who do not believe in the resurrection of bodies. They regard themselves, you see, as great despisers of the body, because they consider that they have their bodies as prisons, into which they think souls have been thrust, because they have previously sinned somewhere else. But our God made both the body and the spirit; he is the creator of each, and he also recreates each; he established each of them and he also re-establishes each of them. So the martyrs did not despise the flesh or persecute it, as if it were the enemy. *For nobody ever hated his own flesh* (Eph 5:29). Much rather, they were looking after its interests, when they seemed



to neglect it; when by persevering in it faithfully they endured temporary torments, they earned eternal life even for the flesh itself.

*The health of the body is the harmony  
of these things of which it consists*

4. Who, though, could ever express in words what the glory of this flesh will be in the resurrection? None of us has yet had any experience of it. Now we carry the flesh around with us as a burden; because it's needy, it's weak, it's mortal, it's perishable. You see, *the body which is perishing weighs down the soul* (Wis 9:15). But don't be anxious about that in the resurrection. *For it must be that this perishable thing puts on imperishability, and this mortal thing puts on immortality* (1 Cor 15:53). What's now a burden will then be a guerdon;<sup>9</sup> what's now a load will then be a relief. It won't have any weight, you see, as you are now aware of having a body.

Look, my dearest friends; when this body of ours is healthy, even this fragile and mortal object, when it is regulated by the constitution of its parts, when there is nothing in it quarreling with anything else, not heat overcoming and driving out coolness, not warmth being extinguished by an excess of cold—and afflicting the body while the fight's going on; not dryness absorbing the moisture, not the moist overflowing and congesting; but all the things it consists of are balanced with each other in a harmonious relationship, which is called health.<sup>10</sup> In a word, the health of the body is the harmony of those things of which it consists. So this health, that is the harmony of parts and of humors in a perishable object, in an object that is needy and weak, in an object which can still be hungry and thirsty, grow tired by standing, be rested by sitting, again grow tired of sitting; grow faint from being hungry, be refreshed by eating; which cannot relieve past deficiencies unless others have started—whatever you take, after all, to refresh yourself when you are tired, is simply the start of another form of tiredness, because if you persist in the thing you've taken for relief, you will grow tired of that too—so in this weak and perishable body, what does this health, such as it is, amount to, after all? In any case, what's called health in weak and perishable flesh is in no way to be compared with the health of the angels, with whom we are promised equality in the resurrection.

And yet this health, such as it is, how delightful it is, what a desirable good it is for everybody! What a great thing a poor man has, when this is the only thing he has! What a great thing a rich man doesn't have, when this is the only thing he doesn't have! How can he boast of having plenty? Fever doesn't dread a couch inlaid with silver; it's not afraid of the rich man's display, not afraid of the warrior's weapons.

*Working out what the health of the resurrection may be,  
from our experience of this kind of health we know*

5. So what is this health, which the martyrs were right to think little of, because they hoped for another kind in the flesh itself? Still, because we haven't

yet experienced that other kind, we must do the best we can to infer what it's like from this sort that we do know. What is health? If you ask me, what's seeing, as far as the body is concerned I will answer you, perhaps, that it's sensing shapes and colors. If you ask me, what's hearing, I will answer, sensing sounds. If you ask, what's smelling, I will answer, sensing smells. What's touching? Sensing, feeling the hard and the soft, the hot and the cold, the rough and the smooth, the heavy and the light. What's health? Sensing, feeling nothing.

But even these other things in us don't amount to much here and now, in comparison with the senses of other creatures. You have sharp sight; possibly the eagle's is sharper than yours. Acute hearing; there are little animals that hear much more acutely. You have a keen sense of smell; you don't beat the acute perceptions of the dog. You distinguish flavors with a very delicate sense of taste; there are animals which can discern grasses they have not experienced, and they don't touch the sort that harms them. You, I mean to say, however discriminating your taste of food, carelessly gobble up poison. You have a fine sense of touch; how many birds can feel in advance the coming of summer, and change their habitat; feel in advance that winter is looming ahead, migrate to warmer climes? What you feel when it comes, they feel in advance before it comes. And this point that I have praised as regards health; a stone feels nothing, a tree nothing, a corpse nothing.

*Even a healthy body that is perishable weighs down the soul*

6. Did that governor Dacian, I mean, feel nothing in his heart, when he was raging against a corpse that could feel nothing? I ask you, what could he now do to one who could feel nothing, seeing that he had managed to be defeated by him when he could feel something? All the same, he did what he could, he did it out of anger. But the one who was not suffering anything now in the open,<sup>11</sup> was being crowned in secret. He held firm, you see, to the advice of his Lord, who wanted to reassure us about those who kill the body, and so had said, *Do not fear those who kill the body, and afterward have nothing they can do* (Mt 10:28). How have they nothing they can do afterward, when that raving lunatic did so many things to Vincent's body? But what in fact did he do to Vincent, seeing that he did nothing to him even when he could feel anything?

So then it isn't just not to feel, as a stone doesn't feel, as a tree doesn't feel, as a corpse doesn't feel; but to live in the body and to feel nothing of its being a burden, that's what being healthy is. And yet, however healthy people may be in this life, they feel the weight even of a healthy body. The soul is weighed down even by a healthy *body which is perishing* (Wis 9:15), that is to say, perishable. It weighs down the soul, that is, it doesn't submit to the soul at the bidding of its every whim. It submits to it in many things; it moves the hands to work, the feet to walk, the tongue to speak, the eyes to see, it applies the hearing to the perception of voices. In all these respects the body is compliant. Your eagerness to go somewhere else feels its burden, feels the weight of it; the body doesn't move with all that ease, to reach where you want to go. You, in your

body, are longing to see a friend, in his body; you know he's a long way away, many a day's journey lies between you. You have already gone ahead in spirit; when you arrive in the body, that's when you feel what a burden you are carrying. The weight of the flesh was unable to obey the will as regards the speed anticipated. It couldn't be whirled along at the speed you wished, the speed at which your spirit carries it. It's slow and burdensome.

*The spiritual body will enjoy an unimaginable ease  
and speed of movement*

7. Can we think of anything the body has, by which to test the speed of the body? Shall we say the feet? What could be slower? They are the things that get us there, and they follow our desires with great difficulty, and they get us there by exerting tremendous effort. But imagine someone as swift as some animals are, with which we simply cannot be compared for speed; imagine somebody as swift as the birds are. He still can't get there at the very moment he wants. Birds fly for a long time when they are migrating, and sometimes when they are tired, they rest on the spars of ships. So even if we could fly like birds, we would still be slow in comparison with our desire to get there.

When, however, the body has become spiritual, about which it says, *It is sown embodying the soul, it will rise embodying the spirit* (1 Cor 15:44); what ease, what swiftness, what prompt obedience to the will it shall display! In no way a weight, in no way in need of anything, in no way getting tired, in no way one part of it resisting and opposing another.

*This feast day an occasion to say something about the spiritual body*

8. What sort of body was that, which the Lord caused to pass through closed doors? Pay close attention, please, and let's see if, with the Lord's help, I can either satisfy your expectations with any sort of words, or at least not fall too far short of them. The occasion has arisen to discuss the spiritual body a little, from the passion of the martyr, by whom we saw, to our amazement, the body so despised amid his torments. I said, you remember, that by not sparing the body, he was taking care of the very same body's best interests;<sup>12</sup> in case perhaps, by running away from temporal pains and denying Christ, he should destine the selfsame body to everlasting punishments of the most dreadful kind.

So that's why I am eager to urge upon you, and upon myself, the importance of making light of things present and setting our hopes on things to come. *Indeed in this dwelling we are groaning, being weighed down*; and yet we don't want to die, and we dread being stripped of that weight. *For we do not wish to be stripped, but to be given overclothes, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life* (2 Cor 5:4). So I have taken this opportunity to speak to you a little about the spiritual body; and I have thought it best to draw your attention first of all to this very health of the fragile and perishable body, so that from it we may discover something much greater.

We found that this health means feeling nothing. Indeed, we have many things inside us, in our entrails; would any of us know about them unless we had seen them in butchered bodies? Our guts, our innards, which are called intestines, how do we know about them? And then, precisely, it's good, when we don't feel them. When we don't feel them, after all, when we are unaware of them, is when we are healthy. You say to someone, "Observe the esophagus." He answers you, "What's the esophagus?"<sup>13</sup> Lucky ignorance! He doesn't know where he keeps what is always healthy. If it wasn't healthy, he would feel it; if he could feel it, he would be aware of it, and not for his own good.

*The speed of the heavenly bodies, and of the bodies of angels*

9. But however much we praised the body's health, we came to the matter of its speed of movement, and found we are, practically speaking, made of lead. How swift are the heavenly bodies? Do you want to know how swift? You look at the sun, and it seems to you as if it's not moving, and yet it is. Perhaps you'll say it's moving, but very slowly. Do you want to establish by reason what you can't perceive by sight? If you were to gallop by express post-horses on a straight road from the east to the west on this earth, how many days would it take you to get there? However swiftly the horses carried you, how many stages would you have to make? The sun, which seems to you to be standing still, covers the space of the journey from the first point east to the last point west in a single day, and in a single night returns to the place of its rising. I don't want to mention, because the matter's obscure, and hard to convince people about, and probably uncertain, how much, much vaster are the heavenly spaces than those on earth.

So when we see that the movements of the heavenly bodies are so swift, though they seem to us when we look at them not to be moving at all; what speed can we ascribe to the angelic body?<sup>14</sup> Yes, they were present, and when they wished they offered themselves to the sight and the touch of men. Abraham washed the feet of angels; he not only washed those bodies, he even handled and felt them.<sup>15</sup> They appeared, as they wished, when they wished, to whom they wished. They experience not the least difficulty, no sluggishness whatsoever. But we don't see them running, we don't see them moving from place to place, so that we observe them departing from the sight of men; whenever they wished, they have arrived. So even they fail to provide us with an absolutely plain example of this swiftness.<sup>16</sup> Let us leave aside things unknown to us, and not be so bold as rashly to presume anything about things outside our experience.

*The speed of the eye's rays*

10. In this very body which we carry around with us, I can find something whose inexpressible swiftness astonishes me; the ray from our eye, with which we touch whatever we behold.<sup>17</sup> What you see, after all, is what you touch with the ray from your eye. If you want to see further, and some solid body is placed between, the ray runs up against the interposed body, and is not allowed to reach

the thing you desire to see; and you say to the obstacle, "Be off; you're in my way." You want to see a column, a man is standing in between you and it, he is obstructing your gaze. The ray is emitted from you, but it gets as far as the man, is not allowed to get as far as the column; it runs up against something else, it isn't let through. Now the one who was in your way has moved aside from the middle, your gaze reaches what it wanted to.

Now distinguish, and find an answer, if you can, to the question whether this gaze, this ray from your eye reached the nearer object sooner, the distant one later. You saw a man standing nearby; you saw him with as much of an interval of time, you directed your eye's ray to him with as much of an interval, you reached him with your eye's ray with as much of an interval as you also reached that column you were wanting to see, and hadn't been able to because the man was in the way. You don't get to him sooner and to it later; and here he is, nearby, and it's a long way off. If you wanted to walk, you would get to the man sooner than to the column; because you wanted to see, you have got to the column as soon as to the man.<sup>18</sup>

That's nothing, about the man and the column. Cast your eyes still further, you see a wall a long way off; send them further, you arrive at the sun. How big is the distance between you and the sun? Who could ever measure such distances as that? Whose wits could ever be sharp enough to work out how far the sun is from you? And yet, as soon as you open your eyes, lo and behold, you yourself are here, your ray is there. As soon as you wanted to see it, you reached it by seeing it. You didn't look around for machines to attempt it with, not for ladders to climb up to it, not for ropes to lift yourself up to it, not for wings to fly to it. Just opening your eyes constitutes reaching it.

*The resurrection compared, in speed, to the twinkling of an eye*

11. So what speed is this? How fast is it? What does it signify? It belongs to our body, it is emitted from our flesh. We all have rays, and we aren't astonished; we reflect a little, and we are thunderstruck. You won't find anything to compare with this speed, as far as the speed of bodies is concerned. Rightly did the apostle Paul compare the ease of the resurrection with this speed, when he said, *In the twinkling of an eye* (1 Cor 15:52). The twinkling of an eye does not consist in closing and opening the eyelids, because this is done more slowly than seeing. You bat an eyelid more slowly than you direct a ray. Your ray gets to the sky more quickly than the batted eyelids reach the eyebrow. You can see what the twinkling of an eye is; then you can see what ease the apostle gave to the resurrection of bodies.

How slowly all this was created and formed! Let's call to mind the delays of conception, and the seeds of babies taking shape in their mothers' wombs; limbs formed through a particular count of time, for a fixed number of days, for many months, until what has been created and shaped within is brought forth to the light. After that, how lingering is its growth, how lingering the succession of adolescence to boyhood, of youth to adolescence, of old age to youth, of death

to all of them! There is yet more lingering delay to come; a recently dead corpse seems complete, it starts disintegrating in decay. And spaces of time are needed for this disintegration, until it dissolves in putrescence, dries up into dust and ashes. And from its beginnings in the womb to its final dust in the tomb, how long has time lingered? How many days have there been, what intervals of time? It comes to the point of rising again, it is restored in the twinkling of an eye.

*He will transfigure our lowly body  
to be conformed to his glorious body*

12. So then, brothers and sisters, think carefully, and when comparing things, compare them with things that are comparable. This flesh of ours moves more quickly by walking than it took shape in the womb, than it was reared, than it grew, than it arrived at the stage of youth, and received its full stature and maturity. It moves faster in walking than all this can happen to it. For all that, though, the resurrection will happen in the twinkling of an eye. How fast will it be able to move, if it can have been as quick as that in rising again? Bodies have been torn to pieces in savage barbarity; even though the limbs and organs of the dead have been dispersed all over the world, and their ashes scattered all over the earth, everything that has been scattered is recovered from all over the earth's vast bosom in the twinkling of an eye.

We marvel at the almost excessive speed of our rays which issue from our eyes, which would be incredible unless we had experience of it. Much more marvelous is the agility that will mark the spiritual body of the future. It will indeed rise again in the twinkling of an eye, but our Lord even made his body pass through a closed door, which the rays from our eyes cannot do. After his resurrection, when his disciples were together in one place, he suddenly appeared to them, though the doors were closed.<sup>19</sup> He was even able to enter by a way we are unable to see. Now none of you should say, "Yes, but it was the Lord's body that could do this; that surely doesn't mean, does it, that mine too will be able to do it on the spot?" Even on this point be completely reassured by the Spirit who was speaking through the apostle. In fact it was said about the Lord himself, *who will transfigure our lowly body to be conformed to his own glorious body* (Phil 3:21).

*Can God be seen by the glorified body?  
No, because he is not visible like a body in place and space*

13. So about a body such as this, about such ease and agility, such swiftness of movement and such health as this body enjoys, human frailty must not presume to make any rash and bold assertions. What we shall be like then, we shall know when we are. Before we are, let us not be rash—or we may not get to be that after all. Human curiosity, you see, sometimes pokes around, and says to itself, "Do you suppose that by means of that spiritual body we shall see God?" To which a quick answer can be given: God is not to be seen, as though

he were spread out in space, and divided by distance. Although he fills heaven and earth, that doesn't mean he is half in heaven and half on earth. If this air, of course, fills heaven and earth, that part of it which is in heaven is not on earth. And anything that water fills, it fills indeed the space by which it is contained; but half of it is in one half of the space, half in the other half, all of it in the whole space. God isn't anything like that.

Have no doubts at all about this: that God is not a body. It is proper to bodies to be spread out through space, to be contained in place, to have parts, halves, thirds, quarters, wholes. Nothing like that with God, because God is whole everywhere, not half of him in one place, with the other half somewhere else; but all of him is in heaven, all of him on earth. *In the beginning was the Word*—so that you may hear the same truth about the Son, because the Son too is one God with the Father, equal not in bulk but in divinity. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing* (Jn 1:1-3). This only-begotten Son abides, all of him, with the Father, and shines, all of him, in the darkness,<sup>20</sup> is all of him in heaven, all of him on earth, all of him in the virgin, all of him in the infant; it is not as though he were moving through a succession of times from place to place.

You too, I mean, are the whole of you in your house and the whole of you here in church; but when you're in church you are not in your house; when you're in your house, you are not in church. So it's not the same with him; as though with the whole of him in heaven, the whole of him on earth, the whole of him in the virgin, the whole of him in the infant (to mention nothing else), he moved from heaven to earth, from earth to the virgin, from the virgin to the infant; but the whole of him is everywhere simultaneously. After all, he isn't poured out like water, or divided and carted around in bulk<sup>21</sup> like earth. When he is all on earth, he doesn't abandon heaven; again, when he fills heaven, he doesn't withdraw from earth. After all, *she*<sup>22</sup> *reaches mightily from end to end, and disposes all things sweetly* (Wis 8:1).

*Whatever the eyes of the spiritual body may be able to see,  
God is not a body circumscribed by space and place*

14. So then, if bodily eyes, when the body has become spiritual, are then at least able to see such a substance by some hidden power, some power not yet experienced and totally unknown to us, and not even guessed, if they are able to, fine, let them. After all, we look with our eyes, we don't look askance at our eyes.<sup>23</sup> Only don't let us strive to reduce God to a place, don't let's strive to shut God up in a place, don't let's strive to spread God out in any kind of bulk through extended space; let us not have the nerve to do that, let's not even think of it. Let the substance of divinity remain in its own proper dignity. Let us, certainly, as far as we can, change for the better; let us not change God for the worse. Especially because we cannot find anything definite about that<sup>24</sup> in scripture, or haven't yet found it.

I mean I daren't be too positive even about this, that there isn't something in

scripture which is capable of being discovered. Either it isn't there, or it's escaped notice, or it's escaped my notice. If anything can be discovered in either part,<sup>25</sup> I will be happy to accept it; and unless I am thankful for being instructed, not to the man who says it, but to the one who is teaching me through him, I will be ungrateful. All I'm saying is this: that eyes which see what they see through intervals of place, that is, in such a way that there is a space between the seer and what is being seen—otherwise, after all, these eyes don't see; because if you remove the object a very long way away from them, the reason they don't see it is that their rays don't reach things placed far off;<sup>26</sup> while if you move it very close to them, unless there's some interval between the eyes of the seer and the body being seen, it cannot be seen at all; because if, by moving the eyes which something is seen by too close, you touch them with it, by eliminating any space you forego any sight. So this is what I'm saying, that such eyes, which can only see what they do see through intervals of space and place, cannot now see God, and won't be able to see him then, because he is not in a place. So either he will be something else which they can see, and which cannot be seen in a place; or if they continue to be unable to see anything unless it is in a place, they will not be able to see God who is not in a place.

*Whatever the nature of the spiritual body, let us hold on to what we believe about the resurrection of the body and about the nature of God*

15. Until, however, we can investigate more thoroughly what may be understood, or rightly believed, about the spiritual body, let us hold firmly that the body will rise again, let us hold firmly that the form of our bodies is going to be this very one that Christ showed us, or that he promised us in secret.<sup>27</sup> Let us hold firmly that it will embody spirit, not soul, as it does now. That, after all, is stated very plainly, and cannot be gainsaid: *It is sown as an embodiment of soul, it will rise again as an embodiment of spirit* (1 Cor 15:44).

Let us hold firmly that Father and Son and Holy Spirit in their own proper nature, their proper substance, are together and equally invisible, because we believe them to be together and equally immortal, believe them to be together and equally imperishable. There is a place where the apostle states all these things simultaneously: *Now to the king of ages, immortal, invisible, imperishable, to the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen* (1 Tm 1:17). The only God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, immortal, invisible, imperishable; not invisible now, later on visible; because not imperishable now, later on perishable. Just as he is always immortal, just as always imperishable, so too always invisible. If his invisibility can be changed, it is to be feared his immortality may be changed. I think that's why the apostle himself put "invisible" in the middle, between "immortal" and "imperishable." The one about which one might wonder whether it could be overturned, he fortified on both sides.

Let us hold firmly to this unalterable confession. It's not the same thing to stumble over the creature, and to stumble over the creator. Certainly let us discuss and investigate the qualities of creatures, and if we are mistaken in any



particular, let us continue in whatever certainty we have reached. Then, you see, if we have a different idea, *this too God will reveal to us* (Phil 3:16.15). That's why yesterday we discussed at some length, *Blessed are the heart-pure, because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8).<sup>28</sup> Let us all press on with purifying our hearts in every way we can; let us make every effort to be on our guard; let us beg and obtain by all our prayers, as best we can, the power to purify our hearts. And if we are thinking about these things that are outside, remember he said, *Purify the inside, and all that is outside will be pure for you* (Mt 23:26).

*How flesh and how the heart will see the salvation of God*

16. It may seem to some of you that the evidence about the flesh is as clear as about the heart, because it is written, *All flesh shall see the salvation of God* (Lk 3:6). We have the clearest evidence about the heart: *Blessed are the heart-pure, because they shall see God* (Mt 5:8). And about the flesh we have, *All flesh shall see the salvation of God*. Who could doubt now that the vision of God has been promised to the flesh, unless we were uncertain what the salvation of God is? Or rather because we are certain, because we have no doubts at all: the salvation of God is Christ the Lord. And so, if our Lord Jesus Christ were to be seen only in his divinity, nobody would doubt that flesh is going to see the substance of God; because *all flesh shall see the salvation of God*.

But while our Lord Jesus Christ can also be seen, as far as his divinity is concerned, by the eyes of the heart that are pure, perfect, full of God, he was, nonetheless, also seen in the body, according to what is written, *After this she appeared on earth, and spent time among men* (Bar 3:37).<sup>29</sup> So how do I know in what sense it said, *All flesh shall see the salvation of God*? That it will see Christ has been said, nobody should have any doubts about that.

But whether the Lord Christ in the body, or as *he was in the beginning, the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (Jn 1:1), that's what we are in two minds about, what we are inquiring about. Don't just press one piece of evidence on me; I'm quite ready to admit, *All flesh shall see the salvation of God*. They say this means, "All flesh shall see the Christ of God." But Christ was also seen in the flesh, not indeed the mortal flesh, if that spiritual transfiguration is still to be called flesh;<sup>30</sup> because he did say himself after the resurrection, to those who could see and touch him, *Feel and see that a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you can see that I have* (Lk 24:39). He will be seen like that too; not only has been seen, but also will be.

And perhaps it is then that the words *all flesh* will be more perfectly fulfilled. Now, I mean to say, flesh has seen him, but not all flesh; then however, at the judgment, as he comes with his angels to judge the living and the dead, *when all who are in the tombs hear his voice and come forth, some to the resurrection of life, others to the resurrection of the judgment* (Jn 5:28-29), it is not only the just, but also the wicked, those on the right, these on the left, who will see that form which he was pleased to take on for us; because even those who killed him *will look on the one whom they have pierced* (Zec 12:10; Jn 19:37; Rv 1:7). So

*all flesh shall see the salvation of God.* Body will be seen by body; because he will come to judge in his real body. But to those placed on the right and sent on into the kingdom of heaven, he is going to show himself in the same way as he could already be seen in the body; and yet he had said, *Whoever loves me shall be loved by my Father; and I will love him, and manifest myself to him* (Jn 14:21).<sup>31</sup> This is something the godless Jew will not see: *for the godless shall be taken away, lest he should see the glory of God* (Is 26:10).

*More about seeing Christ in his humanity*

17. The just Simeon saw him with his heart, because he recognized the infant; and he saw him with his eyes, because he took the infant in his arms. Seeing him in both ways, recognizing the Son of God, and cuddling the one begotten of the virgin, he said, *Now, Lord, you are letting your servant go in peace, since my eyes have seen your salvation* (Lk 2:25.28-30). Notice what he said. You see, he was being kept until he should see with his eyes what he already perceived with faith. He took the baby body, he cradled the body in his arms; on seeing the body, that is on perceiving the Lord in the flesh, he said, *My eyes have seen your salvation.* How do you know that isn't the way in which *all flesh is going to see the salvation of God?*

But in case we should despair, because he is going to come for judgment in that form which he received from us, and not in the one in which he has remained equal to the Father,<sup>32</sup> let us listen on this point also to the voice of angels. When he was carried up to heaven before the very eyes of his disciples, and they were watching, and escorting him, the desire of their hearts, with their gaze, they heard the angels say, *Men of Galilee, why are you standing, gazing up into heaven? This Jesus who has been taken from you, will come in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven* (Acts 1:11). So in the same way, he will come in the same way as he departed into heaven. He will come, visible, to judgment, because he departed, visible, into heaven. I mean, if he departed visible and comes invisible, how will he *come in the same way?* But if he comes in the same way, he will come visible; and *all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

*Let us all try to turn our bodies into spirit,  
provided we don't turn God into a body*

18. I haven't said all this—remember, as far as you can, that we should learn, as far as we are able to discover it, what we don't yet know; but as for what we do know, there is no need to learn it, but with God's help to teach it; so I haven't said all this because I have been denying that flesh is going to see; but because clearer evidence has to be sought, if it can possibly be found. I mean, as for what has been offered, you can see what it's like. After all, it suits me better, or truth itself better, or those who maintain as certain that flesh is not going to see God in any way at all, not even in the resurrection of the dead. I myself am not arguing

about this, but just reminding the sharper wits among you, and ramming it home to the slower ones. Although I may be boring many of you, I will say it all the same.

God cannot be seen in a place, because he is not a body; because he is everywhere, because he is not less in one part, and more in another. Let us hold on to this with the utmost firmness. But if that flesh undergoes such a change that by it can be seen what cannot be seen in a place; fine, let it be so. But we have to inquire where that is taught. And if it isn't yet taught, it shouldn't yet be denied; but certainly it must at least be doubted. In such a way, however, that there is no doubting that the flesh will rise again, no doubting an embodiment of spirit coming to be from the embodiment of soul, no doubting this perishable and mortal thing putting on immortality and imperishability,<sup>33</sup> so that *we may continue in that which we have reached* (Phil 3:16). Certainly, if in any respect we go astray by inquiring too much, at least let us go astray over creatures, not over the creator. Let us all do our best to turn body into spirit, provided, though, we don't turn God into body.

### NOTES

1. So Fischer, Kunzelmann, la Bonnardière and Perler. Perler maintains it was preached in Carthage, in the Restored Basilica there, during one of Augustine's very rare winter visits to the metropolis. But the Maurists record a title given in one manuscript, which says the sermon was (oddly) "about the Restored Basilica of the glorious martyr Vincent on the ramparts." "On the ramparts" is how I translate *in vallis*; and some scholars consider it was preached at a place called Valla, tentatively identified with a modern place name, Sidi Medien. But I wonder if these scholars take into account the fact that Sermon 53 was preached a day before this sermon in the same town, if not in the same church. Wherever it was preached, it is really rather a bad sermon, or a badly organized lecture, on the resurrection of the body.

2. *Expectavimus*; not the word one expects here. It may be explained by their having been keeping an all night vigil. Or it is just possible that *expecto* was sometimes used in the simple sense of watching, synonymous with *specto*.

3. For what happened to Vincent's body, see Sermons 274, note 3; 275, note 9.

4. See 1 Kgs 17:4-16. Elijah is to the widow as the relics of the saints are to the Church.

5. Much more succinct in the Latin: *ad memorias orationum, non ad glorias martyrum*, where both *memorias* and *glorias* are employed in both concrete and abstract senses.

6. By denying Christ to avoid martyrdom.

7. See 1 Cor 15:51, which in the Latin version reads, "We shall all rise, but we shall not all be changed"; whereas what Paul wrote in Greek was, "We shall not all fall asleep, but we shall all be changed." Augustine's interpretation of the Latin makes it consistent with verse 52.

8. That is, despising the body. He is here attacking the Neoplatonist theosophists of recent times, above all Porphyry, a disciple of the great Plotinus. Augustine himself is often accused of entertaining a Neoplatonist, even a Manichee, contempt for the flesh. Here is the clearest possible refutation of that calumny.

9. *Quod nunc est onus, erit honor*.

10. He has forgotten that he has not extricated himself from the subordinate clause with which he began.

11. Several manuscripts read, “who was not suffering now from the one who was raging openly.”
12. See section 3 above.
13. The Latin has *stomachus*. But would any English speaker not know what the stomach is? The admirable Messrs Lewis and Short inform us that the primary reference of *stomachus* is to the esophagus or alimentary canal—and which of us knows what that is?
14. Along with most of his contemporaries, Augustine thought of angels as having very refined gaseous or airy bodies.
15. See Gn 18:4-8.
16. The swiftness, that is, of the spiritual body. They don’t provide us with an example, because we cannot see them. But presumably they provide us with a comparison.
17. His theory of vision, as we have discovered before, is that it is an active rather than a passive power; rays go out from the eyes—and presumably on meeting a visible object send back the message to the subject, like the antennae of an insect, perhaps; or perhaps they bounce straight back to the eye, like radar. Their speed is what we would call the speed of light, except that the speed he inferred seems faster than that of light; it is instantaneous. He has no apparent conception of the seven or eight minutes which it takes, I believe, for the sun’s rays to reach us.
18. He actually appears to say, “you have got to the man as soon as to the column”: *tam cito ad hominem quam ad columnam*. But I think Latin speakers tended to get their *tams* and *quams* the wrong way round.
19. See Jn 20:19.
20. See Jn 1:5.
21. Reading *mole* instead of the text’s *molimine*: carried round with great effort. But that seems quite irrelevant to the point he is making.
22. Wisdom, identified with the Word.
23. A remark only worth making, if at all, for the sake of the play on words: *Oculis enim videmus, non oculis nostris invidemus*; so barely reproducible in English, that I was tempted to omit it from the text altogether.
24. Not about changing God for the worse, of course, but about what we may be able to see in the spiritual body with our bodily eyes. These, by the way, are so called in order to distinguish them from our minds’ eyes, or the eyes of the heart as he prefers to call them.
25. Of scripture, in Old Testament or New.
26. He has apparently forgotten that he has talked of them reaching the heavenly bodies.
27. What can he mean by this last phrase? He is possibly referring to Christ saying that in the resurrection we will be like the angels in heaven. But that was not promised in secret; it was said to the Sadducees, Mk 12:25.
28. See Sermon 53, note 1.
29. The writer is talking about Wisdom, as embodied in the law. For Augustine, the text applies to Christ as the Word. So his quotation still leaves his problem unsolved. It doesn’t refer to the vision of Christ as man, as his disciples saw him after the resurrection.
30. Why this hesitant proviso, seeing that he goes on to quote the risen Christ calling it flesh? This sermon does indeed show us Augustine at his most dithering!
31. He really is saying what he wants to say in the most round-about and back-to-front manner! What he wants to say, surely, is that the just are going to see more than the human flesh of Christ; though whether with their bodily eyes is the unresolved question.
32. See Phil 2:6-7.
33. See 1 Cor 15:44.53.

## SERMON 277A

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF SAINT VINCENT

Date: 411<sup>1</sup>

*The martyr's justice makes beautiful  
the horrifying tortures he underwent*

1. Christ commands us to celebrate with due solemnity the heroic and glorious sufferings of the holy martyr Vincent, and not to be slow in preaching about it. We have seen in spirit, and gazed in thought at all that he endured, that he heard, that he answered, and how a marvelous spectacle was staged before our very eyes: the wicked judge, the blood-thirsty torturer, the invincible martyr, a contest between cruelty and piety; on this side raving madness, on that a splendid victory. With the reading sounding in our ears, charity blazed up in our hearts; we would have loved to embrace and kiss, if it had been possible, those ravaged limbs; it amazed us that they could provide room for so many punishments, and with inexpressible feelings we yearned for them not to be tormented.

After all, who would want to see an executioner at his savage work, and a man, lost to all humanity, tearing furiously at a human body? Who would enjoy observing limbs wrenched apart by the machinery of the rack? Who would not oppose the natural shape of a man being violated by human technique, bones disjoined by being stretched, laid bare by the flesh being clawed off them? Who could fail to be horrified? And yet the justice of the martyr was making all this horror beautiful; and the stupendous courage he showed for the faith, for religion, for the hope of the age to come, for the love of Christ, was shedding over the hideous and ghastly aspect of his torments and his wounds a magnificent glory.

In a word, our interest in one and the same spectacle is quite different from that of the persecutor. He was enjoying the martyr's punishment, we its cause; he was taking pleasure in what he was suffering, we in why he was suffering; he in his torments, we in his strength; he in his wounds, we in his crown; he, because his pains were lasting such a long time; we, because he was not being broken by them in the least; he, because he was being ill-treated in the flesh; we, because he was abiding in the faith. And so at the very point where that man's monstrous inhumanity was being satisfied, he was himself being tor-

mented by the martyr's superhuman fidelity; while we could scarcely endure the horrors he was imposing, but were still sharing Vincent's victory as he died.

*The martyr's constancy and patience,  
like everything else he and we have received, comes from God*

2. All the same, it was not in himself or by himself that even this champion of ours emerged victorious, but in the one and by the one who being exalted above all others provides him with assistance, who having suffered above all others has left him an example. He it is who urges him on to the battle, who calls him to the prize; and who watches him in his contest in such a way that he helps him in his difficulties. He instructed his athlete what to do, and set before him what he would receive, while also supporting him to make sure he didn't fail. So then, pray with simplicity, if you wish to compete with simplicity, to win with agility, to reign in felicity.

We heard our fellow servant speaking, and with his steady and truthful answers silencing the tongue of the persecutor; but before that we heard the Lord saying, *For it is not you that are speaking, but the Spirit of my Father who is speaking in you* (Mt 10:20). And thus the reason this man overcame his adversaries is that he praised his utterances in the Lord. He knew how to say, *In God I shall praise the word, in the Lord I shall praise the utterance; in God I shall hope, I shall not fear what man may do to me* (Ps 56:10-11).

We saw the martyr so patiently enduring the most monstrous torments; but his soul was submitting itself to God, because it was from him that his patience came. And lest human frailty should fail through lack of patience, and deny Christ, and contribute to the enemy's joy, he knew to whom he should say, *My God, rescue me from the hand of the sinner, from the hand of the law-breaker and the wicked; since you are my patience* (Ps 71:4-5). In this way, you see, the person who sang these words<sup>2</sup> signified how Christians should ask to be rescued from the hands of their enemies; not, certainly, by suffering nothing, but by enduring what they suffer with perfect patience. *Rescue me from the hand of the sinner, from the hand of the law-breaker and the wicked.* But if you ask how he wants to be rescued, look at what follows: *since you are my patience.* You will find a glorious passion, wherever there is this devout confession, so that *whoever boasts, may boast in the Lord* (1 Cor 1:31).

And so none of us should be proud of our intelligence, when we have made a good speech; none of us be proud of our strength of character when we suffer temptation; because, in order for us to speak good things, we have to get our wisdom from him; and in order, too, for us to suffer bad things, we have to get our patience from him. So it is ours to will, but we are required to will because we have been called;<sup>3</sup> it's ours to ask, but we do not know what we should ask for.<sup>4</sup> It is ours to receive, but what are we to receive if we don't have?<sup>5</sup> Ours to have, but what do we have, if we haven't received?<sup>6</sup> So there you are; *whoever boasts should boast in the Lord.*

And so the martyr Vincent was worthy to be crowned by the Lord, in whom

he chose to boast through both his wisdom and his patience; worthy of his perennial renown,<sup>7</sup> worthy of eternal bliss, to gain which, whatever the terrifying judge threatened him with, whatever the bloodthirsty executioner inflicted on him, is light indeed. What he endured, after all, is over and done with; what he received is not going to pass away. Certainly, I mean, that's how his limbs were ill-used, that's how his entrails were tormented; yes, yes, these things were done to him; and even if much more dreadful things were done, *the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the future glory that will be revealed in us* (Rom 8:18).

### NOTES

1. Fischer, de Gaiffier and Kunzelmann all actually say, between 410 and 412.
2. He means the psalmist, I think, not the cantor.
3. See Phil 2:13.
4. See Rom 6:26.
5. See Mk 4:25.
6. See 1 Cor 4:7.
7. *Sollemni celebritate*, which could also be translated, "of this solemn celebration." But that is a less satisfactory parallel to the next phrase.

## SERMON 278

### ON THE CALLING OF THE APOSTLE PAUL, AND ON THE LORD'S PRAYER

Date: 414<sup>1</sup>

*Paul, from being a persecutor of Christ,  
was made into a preacher of Christ*

1. Today this reading was recited from the Acts of the Apostles, in which the apostle Paul, from being a persecutor of Christians, was made into a preacher of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Today in those regions the very places bear witness to what happened then;<sup>3</sup> and now it is read out, and believed. The value, though, of this particular event is what the apostle himself mentions in his letters. He says, you see, that he was given pardon for all his sins, and for that raving madness which had him dragging Christians to the slaughter, as an agent of the fury of the Jews, whether in the stoning of the holy martyr Stephen,<sup>4</sup> or in bringing and presenting others for punishment; that he was pardoned for precisely this reason: that none who may have been involved in great sins, and caught in the nets of great crimes, should despair of themselves, as though they would not receive pardon, if they turned to the one who prayed for his persecutors as he hung on the cross, saying, *Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34).

From being a persecutor he was changed into a preacher and the teacher of the nations (2 Tm 1:11). *Previously, he says, I was a blasphemer and persecutor and an insolent man. But the reason I obtained mercy was this, that Christ Jesus might demonstrate his total forbearance first of all in me, for the instruction of those who were going to trust him for eternal life* (1 Tm 1:13.16). It is by the grace of God, you see, that we are saved from our sins, which we are languishing in. His, his is the medicine which cures the soul. I mean, it was well able to injure itself, quite unable to cure itself.

*To heal or restore us to life we need the doctor*

2. In the body too, after all, people have it in their power to get sick, but not equally in their power to get better. I mean, if they exceed the proper limits, and live self-indulgent lives, and do all the things that undermine the constitution and are injurious to health, the day comes, if that's what they want, when they



fall sick. When they've so fallen, though, they don't get better. In order to fall sick, you see, they apply themselves to self-indulgence; but in order to get better, they must apply the doctor's services to their health. As I said, they can't have it in their power to recover their health, as they have it in their power to lose it.

In the same way, as regards the soul, it was within the scope of man's free choice to fall into death by sinning, and so to change from being immortal to being mortal, and to be subjected to the devil who seduced him; with his freedom of choice he chose to turn aside to lower things and forsake the higher, to lend his ears to the serpent and close his ears to God, and set fairly and squarely between instructor and seducer, to comply rather with the seducer than with the instructor.<sup>5</sup> He heard the devil, after all, with exactly the same ears as he heard God.<sup>6</sup> So why didn't he rather trust the better of the two?

And so it was that he discovered what God had foretold was true, what the devil had promised was false. This was the first origin of all our ills, this the root of all miseries, this the seed of death, coming from the first man's very own free will. He had so been made, that if he obeyed God he would be blessed and immortal; while if he neglected and scorned the commandment of the one who wished to preserve perpetual health in him, he would tumble into the disease of mortality. So at that time the doctor was scorned by the healthy person, now at this time he cures the sick person. There are some things, you see, which medicine prescribes for the preservation of health; they are given to the healthy, to keep them from getting sick. While there are others that are prescribed for those who are already sick, to help them recover what they have lost.

It would have been good for the man to obey the doctor while he was in good health, so that he wouldn't ever need the doctor. After all, *it is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick* (Mk 2:17). By doctor, properly speaking, we mean one through whose services health is recovered. Because God is always needed as a doctor even by the healthy, to keep them in good health. So it would have been good for him to hold on to the perpetual health in which he had been created. He scorned it, abused it, fell by his self-indulgence into the ill health of this mortality; let him listen now, at least, to what the doctor prescribes, so that he may rise from the sickbed on which he was laid by sin.

*Health is recovered only slowly by obeying the doctor's prescriptions*

3. But now clearly, brothers and sisters, in the sphere of medicine a healthy person stays as he is by doing what the science of health dictates; but if he begins to get ill, he starts listening to certain prescriptions, and starts carrying them out, if he really cares about getting his good health back completely. However, when he starts doing that, he doesn't immediately get completely well again, but by regularly observing the prescriptions over a length of time, he eventually reaches that state of health which he had lost by being less than regular in his life. The advantage, though, he gets as he starts observing those prescriptions, is that his illness doesn't intensify, so that not only does he not get worse, but little by little he also gets better. There is, after all, some hope of complete health, when a person begins to get less and less sick.

In the same sort of way too, what else is living justly in this life, but listening to the prescriptions of the law, and carrying them out? So does that mean that those who carry out the prescriptions of the law are already healthy? Not yet; but it is in order to become healthy, that they carry them out. Don't let them flag in carrying them out, because what was lost in one go is recovered little by little. If man, after all, were to return at once to his original state of blessedness and bliss, it would just be a game for him to lapse into death by sinning.<sup>7</sup>

*What medicine prescribes is often painful*

4. Someone has caught a disease of the body, for example, through self-indulgence; he has some growth in his body which needs to be lanced, or cut out. Undoubtedly he is going to suffer acute pains; but those pains won't be unprofitable for him. If he refuses to suffer the pains of being operated on,<sup>8</sup> he will suffer the maggots of gangrene. So the doctor starts by saying, "Observe this and that prescription, don't touch this, don't take this or that food or drink, don't let that matter worry you." He starts doing it all, he's already observing the prescriptions; but he isn't yet healthy again.

So what's the value of his observance? To stop the infection he has caught getting worse, and even to get it to decrease. So what follows? He must brace himself to observe even the prescriptions of the doctor's hand as it wields the scalpel, and inflicts on him a salutary pain. So supposing he says, with his septic ulcer, "What's the use of my observing the prescriptions, if I have to suffer the pain of being cut?" He gets the answer, "But each will contribute to your cure; both observing the prescriptions, and enduring the pain. That, after all, is the measure of the damage you have done yourself, by not observing the prescriptions when you were in good health. So submit to the doctor until you are cured; after all, whatever inconvenience you suffer is only what your ulcer deserves."

*The same rule applies to the healing Christ brings us*

5. That's how Doctor Christ comes to the afflicted and those who labor,<sup>9</sup> when he says, *It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the just, but sinners* (Mk 2:17). He calls sinners to peace, he calls the sick to health. He prescribes faith, he prescribes self-control, self-discipline, sobriety; he restrains the cravings of greed; he tells us what to do, what to observe. Those who do observe all this may now be said to be living justly, according to the prescriptions of medicine. But they haven't yet received that health and that total well-being which God promises through the apostle, when he says, *For this perishable thing must put on imperishability, and this mortal thing put on immortality. Then the word will come true, which is written: Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, Death, is your striving? Where, Death, is your sting?* (1 Cor 15:53-55).

That is when there will be complete health, and equality with the holy angels. But now, before that happens, my brothers and sisters, when we start observing

the prescriptions which the doctor has prescribed, and find ourselves suffering some trials and tribulations, we mustn't think that we are observing the prescriptions to no purpose, because greater pain seems to follow your observance of them. You see, the fact that you are enduring tribulations indicates the hand of the doctor operating on you, not the sentence of the judge punishing you. This happens so that health may be complete; let us suffer, let us put up with the pains. Sin is sweet; so it is through the bitter taste of tribulation that this pernicious sweetness must be got out of the system. It gave you pleasure, when you did wrong; but by doing it you collapsed into infirmity. Medicine works in the opposite direction; for a time it causes you pain, so that you may receive health in perpetuity. Use it, don't push it away from you.

*The antidote to all sins: Forgive us our debts, just as we too forgive our debtors; which, if said sincerely, contains the twin precepts, or prescriptions, of charity*

6. Certainly, and above all, don't let that antidote be wanting, which avails against all festering sores, against the poison of all sins: your saying, and genuinely saying, to the Lord your God, *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12). This, you see, is the bargain which the doctor has struck, and sealed, with the sick.<sup>10</sup> Since there are two sorts of sins: by one you sin against God, by the other against human beings. Thus there are also those two precepts, or prescriptions, on which depends the whole law, and the prophets as well: *You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and your whole soul, and your whole mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Mt 22:37-40). And these also contain the ten commandments of the law, where three commandments refer to the love of God, seven to the love of neighbor. This is something we have already dealt with enough at some time or other.<sup>11</sup>

*You sin against God when you wreck his temple in yourself by sins against yourself, even if they are not obviously against your neighbor*

7. So just as there are two commandments, so also there are two kinds of sins. You either sin, I mean, against God, or against human beings. You also sin against God, though, by wrecking his temple in yourself. God redeemed you, after all, bought you back by the blood of his Son; although even before you were redeemed, whose slave were you, please, if not of the one who made all things? He wished, however, to have you in a special way as his own, when redeemed by the blood of his Son. *And you are not your own, says the apostle; for you have been bought at a great price; glorify and carry God in your body* (1 Cor 6:19-20).

So the one you have been redeemed by has made you into his house. Would you, for your part, want your house turned upside down? Well, neither does God want his, that is to say yourself, turned upside down. If you won't spare yourself for your own sake, spare yourself for God's, seeing that he has made you into his temple. *For the temple of God is holy, he says, which is what you are; and,*

*Whoever ruins God's temple, God will ruin him* (1 Cor 3:17). When people commit that sort of sin, they imagine they are not sinning, because they are not harming anybody.

*The evil done by those who sin against themselves*

8. And so this is what I wish to propose to your holinesses, as far as the shortness of time permits: what evil and harm people do, who ruin themselves by gluttony, drunkenness, fornication; and who reply, when taken to task, "I've done it out of my own pocket, my own property. Whom have I robbed of anything? Whom have I filched anything from? Against whom have I done it? I want to have a good time with what God has given me." He seems to himself to be innocent, or harmless, because he's apparently doing nobody any harm.<sup>12</sup>

But how can he be innocent, if he doesn't spare himself harm? Those people are innocent, you see, who don't do harm to anybody; because the standard of love of neighbor is taken from oneself. This, after all, is what God said: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Mt 22:39; Lv 19:18). So how can love of neighbor be whole and entire in you, when your love of self has been wounded by self-indulgence? And anyway, God then says to you, "When you want to ruin yourself with drink, it isn't just anybody's house you're turning upside down, it's mine. Where am I going to live? In these ruins? In this filthy hovel? If you were receiving some servant of mine as a guest,<sup>13</sup> you would repair and clean up the house my servant was to enter. Won't you clean up your heart, which is where I want to live?"

*Do not turn God's gift to your own undoing*

9. So I have mentioned this one thing, brothers and sisters, so that you may see how definitely those people sin who ruin themselves, though in their own opinion they are innocent, or harmless. But there's another point: in this life of mortal frailty it is difficult for us human beings not to go beyond due measure in those things which we make use of from necessity. So to meet that case, there is this remedy to be applied: *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12)—provided you say it, and say it sincerely. You are forbidden to commit adultery, and so wrong your neighbor. Just as you don't want anybody to touch your wife or husband, so you in your turn ought not to touch anyone else's.

If, however, you gratify yourself with yours to the point of self-indulgence, you don't think of yourself as harming anyone, do you, because after all you're doing it with one who is your own. But by the very fact of making rather immoderate use of something that is a concession to you, you are damaging in yourself God's temple. No outsider is accusing you; but what answer will your conscience give to God, when he says to you through the apostle, *that everyone of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor; not in the disorder of desires, like the nations who are ignorant of God* (1 Thes

4:4-5). Are there any married people, though, who in their relations with their partners do not exceed the law of having children? That, after all, is why the concession was made; you are convicted by the contract drawn up in marriage.<sup>14</sup> You are covenanted on how you should marry; the words of the covenant are ringing in your ears: *for the sake of having children*. So if you can manage it, you shouldn't touch your partner, except for the sake of having children. If you go beyond this limit, you will be acting against that contract and against the covenant. Isn't it obvious?

You will be a liar and covenant breaker; and God is looking for the integrity of his temple in you, and he can't find it; not because you have enjoyed your partner, but because you have done so immoderately. I mean you also drink wine from your own cellar, and yet if you drink it to the point of getting drunk, it doesn't mean that you haven't sinned, just because you have been enjoying what is your own. In fact, you have turned God's gift to your own undoing.

*The petition for forgiveness in the Lord's prayer is the remedy for such sins of exceeding the limits*

10. So what is to be done, brothers and sisters? It's as clear as day, and all of us are told so by our consciences, that it is difficult to make use of things allowed us, in such a way that we don't to some extent exceed due limits. But when you exceed due limits, you offend God, whose temple you are. *For the temple of God is holy, and it is what you are*. Don't deceive yourselves, any of you: *Whoever ruins the temple of God, God will ruin him* (1 Cor 3:17). Sentence has been passed, you are found guilty.

What are you going to say in your prayers, when you make your plea to God whom you are offending in his own temple, expelling from his own temple? How will you clean God's temple up again in yourself? How will you bring him back to you? How else, but by saying, with real sincerity of heart, both in words and in deeds, *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12)? Who, after all, is going to accuse you of indulging immoderately in your own food, your own drink, your own marriage partner? No human being is going to.<sup>15</sup> And yet, because God takes you to task, since he requires of you the integrity of his temple, and his dwelling place unspoiled, he has given you a remedy, as though to say, "If you offend me by exceeding due limits—and I will hold you guilty, even when no human being is accusing you; forgive other human beings whatever sins they have committed against you, so that I may forgive whatever sins you commit against me."

*If we ignore this remedy, no hope of salvation is left to us*

11. Hold on to this very firmly, brothers and sisters. You see, should any of you turn down even this remedy, you will be left with no hope whatsoever of salvation. If you say to me, "I don't forgive the sins which people happen to commit against me," there are no grounds left on which I can promise you

salvation. I, after all, can hardly promise what God doesn't promise. If I do, I mean to say, I will not be dispensing God's word, but dispensing the serpent's. The serpent, you see, promised them something good if they sinned, while God threatened them with death. And what else in fact happened to them, but what God had threatened them with? And something far different was done by him, from what that other one had promised.<sup>16</sup>

So do you want me to tell you, brothers and sisters, "Even if you sin, even if you don't forgive other people their sins, you will all certainly be saved; when Christ Jesus comes, he will grant a pardon to everybody"? I don't say that, because I don't hear it. I don't say what isn't said to me. God indeed promises pardon to sinners—but forgiving all past sins to those who are converted, who believe and are baptized. I read this, I make so bold as to promise this, I do promise it, and what I promise is promised to me. And when it's read, we all hear it; we are all, you see, fellow students, there is just one master in this school.

*The difference between grave sins, which require a stiffer work of repentance, and light sins, which can sink us by their very numbers unless they are forgiven by God*

12. So all past sins are forgiven people on conversion; but for the rest of this life<sup>17</sup> there are certain grave and deadly sins, which one can only be released from by the most vehement and distressing humbling of the heart and contrition of spirit<sup>18</sup> and the pain of repentance. These are forgiven through the keys of the Church.<sup>19</sup> If you start judging yourself, you see, if you start being displeased with yourself, God will come along to show you mercy. If you are willing to punish yourself, he will spare you. In fact all who repent and do penance well are punishing themselves. They have to be severe with themselves, so that God may be lenient with them. As David says, *Turn your face away from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities*. But on what terms? He says in the same psalm, *Since I acknowledge my iniquity, and my sin is always before me* (Ps 51:9.3). So if you acknowledge it, he overlooks it.<sup>20</sup>

There are, however, light and tiny sins, which cannot entirely be avoided, which indeed seem to be of minor importance, but which weigh down by their very numbers. I mean, a pile of wheat is put together from the tiniest grains, and yet ships are loaded with it; and if they are overloaded, they sink. One bolt of lightning strikes someone and kills him; but if the rain too is excessive, it can still cause the death of many people with its tiny little drops. The first thing destroys at a stroke, the second drowns by its very numbers. Large wild animals can kill a man with one bite; but tiny ones, when swarming in sufficient numbers, frequently do people to death, and bring such destruction, that the proud people of Pharaoh earned the judgment of pains of that sort.<sup>21</sup> So in the same way,<sup>22</sup> although these sins are tiny, they are for all that so many, that collected together they can form a heap to overwhelm you; but God is good, and even forgives these sins without which this life cannot be lived. How, though, can he forgive them, if you won't forgive the sins committed against you?

*By forgiving others, we pump out the bilges of our souls*

13. This short sentence in the heart of a person is like the scoop with which a ship at sea is bailed out.<sup>23</sup> It cannot avoid, you see, letting in water through the seams of its planking. Gradually, though, by this thin trickle coming in, a considerable quantity collects, enough to sink the ship if it isn't pumped out. In the same sort of way we have in this life too some seams and chinks in our frail mortality, through which sin trickles in from the waves of this world. Let us grab hold of this short sentence, like a bucket, and bail ourselves out, or we shall sink. Let us forgive our debtors their debts, so that God may forgive us our debts. With this short sentence (if it is put into practice, so that we say it genuinely) you pump out whatever has seeped into your bilges.

But be careful; you're still at sea. I mean, when you've done this once, that's not enough, until you have crossed this sea, and reached the *terra firma* of that home country, where you are not tossed about by any waves, and don't have to forgive what isn't committed against you, nor do you wish to be forgiven what you don't commit.

*May you quickly forgive people the wrongs they do you*

14. I think I have sufficiently urged this point upon your graces, and I do urge you, on account of the peril we are in from these waves: let us hold fast to this saving remedy. And just notice how much people must be sinning who are bent on harming the innocent, when even those who won't forgive anyone that harms them are not to be tolerated. So may our brothers<sup>24</sup> consider carefully, and observe who the people are against whom they are nursing bitter feelings of hatred. If they haven't forgiven them, let them consider at least during these days<sup>25</sup> what all this is doing to their hearts. Or else, if they think they're safe, let them put vinegar into jars in which they usually keep good wine. They don't put it there, and they are very careful to avoid tainting the earthenware; and yet they put hatred into their hearts, do they, and are not afraid of what damage it is doing there.

So, brothers and sisters, take good care not to harm anyone, as far as you can; and if the immoderate, self-indulgent use of things permitted has crept up on you, because of the weakness of our human life, keep firmly to this rule—because it is a matter of damaging the temple of God—that you quickly forgive people the wrongs they do you, so that your Father who is in heaven may forgive you your sins.<sup>26</sup>

## NOTES

1. Fischer and Kunzelmann actually suggest between 412 and 416. Poque suggests between 400 and 410. None of them consider that this sermon was preached on the feast of the Conversion of

Saint Paul, 25 January, because it did not figure in the calendar of the North African Church at that time. Nor did the Maurists think so either; but they put this and the next sermon here, after those on Saint Vincent (22 January), as though for that feast, because some earlier editors, and indeed “florilegists” like Florus, ascribed them to 25 January. This sermon was almost certainly preached during paschal time (Poque suggests the Saturday of Easter week), when the Acts of the Apostles were regularly read at Mass. See notes 3 and 25 below.

2. See Acts 9:1-18.
3. Does this mean that Augustine knew that the feast of Saint Paul’s conversion was celebrated in the Syrian Church, and that in fact he was introducing it into his own Church of Hippo Regius, even though it does not figure in the calendar of Carthage? It is possible, I suppose. But when he says that the places bear witness, it is more likely that he is referring to places venerated by pilgrims; and doubtless there was a shrine or chapel of some sort, marking the spot near Damascus where Paul was struck down. Such a shrine is not mentioned in the famous *Pilgrimage of Aetheria*, a lady pilgrim from Gaul about 360, but the text is not complete.
4. See Acts 7:58-60.
5. See Gn 3.
6. The inner ears of the heart.
7. Presumably because it would be so easy to get back into paradise; as some critics of the Catholic sacrament of penance say, it makes forgiveness of sins too easy, a mere formality; what they deprecate as “cheap grace.”
8. Without anesthetics, of course.
9. See Mt 11:28.
10. He doesn’t return to this petition of the Lord’s prayer until section 9.
11. See, for example, Sermon 8. Sermon 9 also deals with the subject of the ten commandments, but it seems to have been preached some years later.
12. Innocent, literally harmless: *innocens, non nocens*.
13. In particular some cleric or monk; someone like Augustine himself in fact. He was very possibly preaching away from his own Church, and would have been staying as a guest with someone.
14. The *tabulae matrimoniales* of Roman law, which declared that the couple were getting married for the procreation of children.
15. One should supply *sotto voce*, “only God is”; this to make good sense of the way he starts the next sentence.
16. See Gn 3.
17. That is, after conversion and baptism.
18. See Ps 51:17.
19. See Mt 16:19; 18:18. In Augustine’s view, the promise made to Peter was made to the whole Church, which Peter represented. By the keys of the Church he meant indeed the sacrament of penance, which involved a much more rigorous discipline in those days than it does now.
20. A play on words: *si ergo tu agnoscis, ille ignoscit*.
21. See Ex 8:16 and the following passage—the plague of gnats.
22. Reading *Sic ergo*, instead of the text’s *Si ergo*, which provides one conjunction too many in a sentence already overburdened with them, to the extent of lacking any main verb.
23. A play on words here, repeated later on: This *sententia* is like the scoop with which a ship *sentinatur*.
24. I suspect he is referring to the Donatists here.
25. The days of Easter time? It sounds more suitable, though, for Lent.
26. See Mt 6:14.



## SERMON 279

### ON THE APOSTLE PAUL

Date: 401<sup>1</sup>

*Paul's conversion, a fulfillment of Jacob's prophetic blessing of Benjamin*

1. We have heard the apostle's words,<sup>2</sup> or rather through the apostle the words of Christ speaking in him, in the one whom he made into a preacher out of a persecutor, by striking and healing, by slaying and bringing to life; the lamb slain by wolves, and making lambs out of wolves. It had been foretold in a notable prophecy, when the holy patriarch Jacob was blessing his sons, touching them as present there and then, looking forward to things to come; what happened in the case of Paul had been foretold. Paul, you see, as he informs us himself,<sup>3</sup> was of the tribe of Benjamin. Now when Jacob, in blessing his sons, came to the blessing of Benjamin, he said about him, *Benjamin is a ravenous wolf*. So what, then? If the wolf is ravenous, is it always ravenous? Surely not! What, though? *In the morning he will ravage, at evening he will divide the prey* (Gn 49:27). This was fulfilled in the apostle Paul, because it had also been foretold about him.

Now, if you agree, let us take a look at him ravaging in the morning, and in the evening dividing the prey. *Morning* and *evening* were put, as though to say, "Before and after." So let us take it like this: "He will ravage before, he will divide the prey afterward." Observe him ravaging: *Saul*, it says, as the Acts of the Apostles tell us, *on receiving letters from the chief priests, that wherever he should find followers of the way of God, he should arrest and bring them*, to be punished, of course, *went off breathing and panting slaughter* (Acts 9:2.1). That's him, ravaging in the morning. Again, when Stephen was stoned, the first martyr for the name of Christ, Saul too was very evidently present. And he was present among those doing the stoning, in such a way that it wouldn't be enough for him to throw stones with his own hands. In order, you see, to be himself active in the hands of all those who were doing the stoning, he kept guard over the coats of them all, showing more savage rage by helping them all, than by throwing stones with his own hands.<sup>4</sup>

We have heard how *in the morning he will ravage*; let us see how *at evening*

*he will divide the prey.*<sup>5</sup> He was laid low by the voice of Christ from heaven, and as he received the injunction forbidding him to rage, he fell on his face. First he must be laid low, then raised up; first he must be struck, later on healed. Christ, after all, would not be able to live in him later on, unless what had previously lived badly were slain in him. So what did he hear when he was laid low? *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goad.* And he: *Who are you, Lord?* And the voice from above: *I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting* (Acts 9:4-5). The head in heaven was crying out for his members still located on earth, and he didn't say, "Why are you persecuting my servants?" but *Why are you persecuting me?* And he answered *What do you wish me to do?* (Acts 22:10).

He is now preparing himself to obey, where previously he had worked himself up to destroy. Already the preacher is being fashioned out of the persecutor, the sheep out of the wolf, the loyal soldier out of the enemy. He heard what he must do. Yes, certainly he was struck blind.<sup>6</sup> For his heart to shine with an inner light, the outer light was for a time snatched away from him; it was withdrawn from the persecutor, to be restored in due course to the preacher. And yet during the period when he couldn't see anything else, he was seeing Jesus. Thus even in his very blindness the mystery of what it is to be a believer was taking shape; since those who believe in Christ ought to fix their gaze on him, ought to reckon everything else as scarcely even real; so that the creature becomes cheap in their eyes, while the creator grows all the dearer in their hearts.<sup>7</sup>

*Paul is brought to Ananias, the wolf led captive to the sheep*

2. So let's see. He is taken to Ananias, and Ananias means sheep.<sup>8</sup> Why, look! The ravenous wolf is brought to the sheep in order to follow it, not ravage it. But in case the sheep should be frightened out of its wits at the sudden appearance of the wolf, the shepherd in heaven, who was arranging all this, told the sheep that the wolf was going to come, but not going to ravage. And yet such frightful reports had preceded that wolf, that the sheep couldn't help being agitated on hearing his name. You see, when the Lord Jesus told this Ananias that Paul had already come to believe, and that Ananias must go to him, Ananias said, *Lord, I have heard about this man, that he has done many bad things against your saints; and now he has received letters from the high priests, authorizing him, wherever he finds followers of your name, to drag them away. But the Lord said to him, Let it be, and I will show him what he must suffer for my name* (Acts 9:13-16).

A great and wonderful thing is being enacted. The wolf is forbidden to rage and rave, the wolf is led captive to the sheep. But such terrible reports about the wolf as ravager had preceded him, that when the sheep heard his name, he was seized with fear, even under the hand of the shepherd. He is encouraged, told he needn't think of him any longer as raging, nor fear him as throwing his weight about. The lamb who died for the sheep reassures the sheep about the wolf.

*Christ, gentle and humble of heart*

3. Then he's the one, to whom we sang last Sunday, *Lord, who is like you? Do not keep quiet, or grow gentle, God* (Ps 83:1).<sup>9</sup> And yet he also says, *Come to me, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble of heart* (Mt 11:28-29). Let's see how he lives up to each idea, and shows that his utterances harmonize with each other in him. He is gentle and humble of heart, because *he was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb without voice in the presence of the shearer, just so he did not open his mouth* (Is 53:7). Hung up on the tree, he bore with the unjust flames of hatred, endured the ministrations of evil-minded tongues; tongues with which they pierced the blameless one, crucified the Just One;<sup>10</sup> tongues of which it had been said, *The sons of men, their teeth are weapons and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword* (Ps 57:4).

And what did the tongue do? What did the sharp sword do? Listen to what it did; notice what follows. *Be exalted above the heavens, God, and over all the earth your glory* (Ps 57:5.11). There you have what the sharp sword did. We know that the Lord was exalted above the heavens, not by seeing it but by believing; that over all the earth his glory, by reading, by believing, by seeing.<sup>11</sup> So see him gentle and humble of heart, to such effect that he brought the trophy of his slaughtered flesh to that glory. See him gentle; hanging on the cross, he said, *Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34); and, *Learn from me, because I am gentle and humble of heart* (Mt 11:29).

Let us learn from you, because you are gentle and humble of heart. Where else could that be more apparent, more fittingly so, than on the cross itself? When his limbs were hung up on the tree, when his hands and feet were fastened there by nails, when they were still raging against him with their tongues, when they were not satisfied with shedding his blood, when the sick failed to recognize the doctor, *Father*, he said, *forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing*. As though to say, "I came to cure the sick; their failure to recognize me is the effect of a dreadful fever." So being gentle and humble of heart, he says, *Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing*.

*Christ did not keep quiet, or grow gentle with Paul*

4. So what about, *Do not keep silent, or grow gentle, God* (Ps 83:1)? Let him fulfill this too. Here you have him not keeping silent: he cried out from heaven, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* (Acts 9:4). He's done *Do not keep silent*; now let him exhibit *and do not grow gentle*. First, because he did not spare the error of his ways, because he did not spare his savage rage, because as he was breathing out slaughter he laid him low with his voice, snatched the light of day from him as he raged, brought him captive to Ananias, whom he was hunting down in the persecution. There you have him not gentle, there you have him raging, not against a man, but against an error. And that's not all; let him continue not to keep silent, not to grow gentle. To Ananias, who was fearful and trembling, when he heard the name of that notorious wolf, *I*, he said, *will show him*. I'll show him! See how he threatens, see how he's still raging. I'll

show him! *Do not keep silent, nor grow gentle, God.* Show the persecutor your severity as well as your goodness. Show him, let him suffer what he did to others, let him learn too to suffer what he used to do to others, let him too feel what he used to inflict on others. *I*, he said, *will show him what he must suffer* (Acts 9:16).

But although<sup>12</sup> he says it as if raging, and fulfills the words, *Do not keep silent, nor grow gentle, God*; let him not depart from these others: *Learn from me, because I am gentle, and humble of heart* (Mt 11:29). *I will show him what he must suffer for the sake of my name.* You have shown him terror; come to his aid, or the one you have made, the one you have found, may suffer to the point of perishing. He's threatening, he doesn't keep silent, he doesn't grow gentle, he threatens. *I will show him what he must suffer for the sake of my name.* What gentle savagery, what merciful rage! You can see him getting the knife ready; he is going to operate, not destroy; going to cure, not kill.

Christ was saying, *I will show him what he must suffer for the sake of my name.* But to what end? Listen to the one who would be suffering: *The sufferings of this time are not worthy*—the one who was suffering is saying it, and he knew for what name he was suffering, and to what effect and profit he was suffering. *The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the future glory that will be revealed in us* (Rom 8:18). Let the world rage, let the world roar, abuse with its tongues, bristle with weapons, do whatever it can; what will it do, compared with what we are going to receive? I weigh what I am suffering against what I am hoping for. I experience the former, believe the latter. And yet what I believe outweighs what I experience. Whatever the savage fury undergone for the name of Christ, if it can be survived, it is endurable; if it cannot be survived, it sets you on your way from here. It doesn't put you out, it hurries you up. What does it hurry you up to? To the actual reward, the actual sweetness, which will have no end when it comes. The work has an end, the wages have none.

*The significance of the names Saul and Paul*

5. This, then, brothers and sisters, this is the chosen vessel, first called Saul after the other Saul.<sup>13</sup> You remember of course, those of you who know God's writings, who the other Saul was. A very bad king, the persecutor of God's holy servant David; and he too, if you recall, was of the tribe of Benjamin.<sup>14</sup> This Saul was from there too, bringing with him the habit of raging, but he would not persist in his rage. Later on, if he's called Saul from the other Saul, where's he called Paul from? Saul from a mad, raving king, while he was himself proud, while he was raging, breathing out slaughter; but Paul, where from? Paul, because little.<sup>15</sup> Paul is a name of humility. He was Paul after he had been brought to the master, who said, *Learn from me, since I am gentle and humble of heart* (Mt 11:29). That's where he's called Paul from. Notice the usage of the Latin language; *paulum* means little; "I will see you a little later, *paulo post*"; "Wait here a little, *paulum hic exspecta*."<sup>16</sup> So now listen to Paul: *I*, he says, *am the least of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:9). Most certainly I am the least of the apostles; and elsewhere, *I am the last of the apostles*.<sup>17</sup>

*God exalts the humble*

6. Both least and last, like the hem of the Lord's garment. What is so slight, so very much the last, as a hem? And yet on touching this the woman was healed of her issue of blood.<sup>18</sup> In this little one there was someone big, in this least of men someone great was living; and so much the less did he shut the big one out from himself, the more he was less himself. Why should we be surprised at the big one living in a small space? It's in the least that he lives the more. Listen to him saying, *Upon whom shall my spirit rest? Upon the humble and the quiet, and the one who trembles at my word* (Is 66:2). The reason the Most High lives in the lowly, is in order to raise the lowly on high. *For the Lord is exalted, and has regard for lowly things; but exalted things he knows from afar* (Ps 138:6). Humble yourself, and he will draw near to you; push yourself forward, and he will withdraw from you.<sup>19</sup>

*What stops you confessing the humble one is your fear of the proud*

7. So what does this least of them say? What we have heard today: *With the heart one believes unto justice, while with the mouth confession is made unto salvation* (Rom 10:10). Many people believe in the heart, and are ashamed of confessing with the mouth. You should know, brothers and sisters, that nowadays there is hardly a single pagan left who isn't amazed in his heart, who doesn't feel that the prophecies have been fulfilled about Christ exalted above the heavens; because they can see his glory over all the earth.<sup>20</sup> But since they are afraid of each other, shy and ashamed in each other's company, they put themselves far from salvation; because it's with the mouth that confession is made unto salvation.<sup>21</sup>

What's the use of having believed with the heart unto justice, if the mouth hesitates to bring to birth what has been conceived in the heart? God sees faith inside; but that's too little. What stops you confessing the humble one is your fear of the proud; and you put the proud before the one who for your sake incurred the displeasure of the proud. You're afraid to confess the humble Son of God. The great Word of God, *the power of God, the wisdom of God* (1 Cor 1:24), you're not ashamed to confess that. You're ashamed to confess him as born, crucified, dead. The Most High, exalted, and equal to the Father, *through whom all things were made* (Jn 1:3), through whom you were made too, became what you are; on your account became man, on your account was born, on your account died.

Sick man, how will you ever be cured, if you're ashamed at your treatment? Choose the time; *now is the time* (2 Cor 6:2). Later on that *man despised* (Is 53:3) will come and claim universal admiration, that man who was judged will come to judge, that man who was killed will come to raise the dead, that man who was dishonored will come to distribute honors. There's now, and there's later on; now it's a matter of faith, later on it will be openly manifest. Choose at this time what part you will have in the time to come. Are you ashamed of the name of Christ? For the fact of being ashamed now before men, you will

have something to be ashamed of, when he comes in glory to pay back what he promised to the good, what he threatened to the bad.<sup>22</sup> Where will you be? What will you do, if that exalted one turns to you and says to you, “You were ashamed of my humility, you shall not share in my glory”? So away with a bad sort of shame; on with a salutary shamelessness, if shamelessness it should be called. But all the same, brothers and sisters, I have forced myself to say this, and not to be in the least afraid.<sup>23</sup>

*Christ's birth and death show us what we are; his resurrection and ascension offer us what to hope for*

8. You see, I don't want us to be ashamed of the name of Christ. Let them taunt us with believing in a man who was crucified, in one who was killed. Most certainly in a man who was killed; but if blood had not flowed from him, the bond of our sins would still have its hold on us.<sup>24</sup> Yes, definitely I have come to believe in a man who was killed; but what was killed in him was what he took from me, not what made me. Yes, definitely I believe in a man who was killed—but in what man who was killed? In someone who came, and received something. Who was it that came? One *who, while he was in the form of God, did not think it robbery to be equal to God*. That's who came; what did he receive? *But he emptied himself, receiving the form of a servant, made in the likeness of men* (Phil 2:6-7). The maker made, the creator created. But made and created in what? In the form of a servant, by receiving the form of a servant, not by losing the form of God. So in this form of a servant, in what he received from us and for us, he was both born, and he suffered, and rose again, and ascended into heaven. I have mentioned four things. He was born, he died, he rose again, and he ascended into heaven. Two first, two last. With the two first he showed you your condition; with the two last he presented you with an example of your reward. You knew all about being born and dying; this region of the dying<sup>25</sup> is full of these two things. What is there always plenty of here, in all flesh, if not of being born and dying? This is something humanity shares with animals; so we share this life with animals. We were born, we are going to die. That, though, is something you didn't yet know; rising again and ascending into heaven. Two things you knew, two things you didn't. He took to himself what you knew, he showed you what you didn't know. Endure what he took to himself, hope for what he showed you.

*Comparing temporal and eternal death*

9. I ask you, after all; if you don't want to die, does it mean you aren't going to die? Why be afraid of something you cannot avoid? You are afraid of what's going to happen, even if you don't want it to; and you're not afraid of what won't happen if<sup>26</sup> you don't want it to. What have I just said? For all human beings ever born, God has established death as the means by which they move on from this world. You will be exempt from death, if you are exempt from the human

race. What are you to do? You are not now being told, are you, "Choose whether you want to be human"? You already are a human being, that's how you've come here. Think about how you are to leave here, think about that. You were born, you are going to die. Run away, take care, fend it off, pay ransom; you can put death off for a while, you cannot put it away for good. It will come, even if you don't want it to; it will come, you know not when. So why be afraid of what's going to happen, even if you don't want it to? Be afraid, rather, of what won't happen, if you don't want it to.

What's that? The godless, unbelievers, blasphemers, perjurers, the unjust, and all evil people have been threatened by God with the burning fires and eternal flames of Gehenna. First compare these two things, death in a moment, and pains for ever and ever. You're afraid of death in a moment; it will come, even if you don't want it to. Fear pains for ever and ever, which won't come, if you don't want them to. It's much worse, what you really ought to fear, and what you have it in your power to ward off from yourself. Yes, it's worse, and far worse, and incomparably worse, what you ought to fear and what you have it in your power to ward off from yourself. After all, whether you live a good life or a bad one, you're going to die; you won't escape dying by living either a good life or a bad one. On the other hand, however, if you choose to live a good life here, you won't be dispatched to eternal punishment. But because you can't choose here not to die, choose, while you are alive, not to die for ever.

That is the faith, that is what Christ showed us by dying and rising again. By dying he showed you what you are going to suffer, willy-nilly; by rising again he showed you what, if you live a good life, you are going to receive. Here is what *one believes with the heart unto justice, makes confession of with the mouth unto salvation*. But you're afraid to confess it, in case people taunt you with it; and not ones who haven't come to believe, because they too believe it inwardly; but in case those who are ashamed to confess it should taunt you with it, listen to what comes next: *For scripture says, Nobody who believes in him shall be put to shame* (Rom 10:10-11; Is 28:16). Reflect on all this, stick to it all. This is prey, food, not for the belly, but for the intelligence. The one who was *ravaging in the morning, was dividing this prey in the evening* (Gn 49:27).<sup>27</sup>

*The one against whom the cry was raised as an enemy of the Christian faith, has received the Christian faith*

10. Because our lord bishop and father<sup>28</sup> commands me to speak to you on this matter also, please listen with just a little more attention. I bring news to your ears of what you can see with your eyes, of the prey snatched from the jaws of the wolf by the mercy and grace of our supreme Shepherd. The one against whom the flock raised the cry has been brought home by the Shepherd.<sup>29</sup> The Lord has not ignored the troubled hearts of his servants; but he wishes to urge upon us the sweetness of his mercy, *making wonderful his mercies* (Ps 17:7), as it is written, so that trouble precedes the joys that are going to follow. The one against whom the cry was raised as an enemy of the Christian faith, has received

the Christian faith. We too could say what Ananias and perhaps some others said, or perhaps some others are still saying, “Who? That man a Christian? That man has believed?” We can neither see nor show the man’s heart. God says, *The things that are out in the open are yours, the things that are hidden are mine* (Dt 29:29). Paul the apostle says, *Brothers, do not make any judgment before the time, until the Lord comes, and lights up the hidden things of darkness, and he will manifest the thoughts of the heart, and then each one will have praise from God* (1 Cor 4:5). You can’t see into the heart of a new Christian. Why, can you even see into the heart of an old one?

You are all going to say, “But he believed out of necessity.” It could also be said about that one we were talking about a little earlier on, who was previously *a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and an insolent man* (1 Tm 1:13). On him too a certain amount of necessity was brought to bear. He was laid low by the heavenly voice; in order to have light, he lost the light. Threaten what you like, and give as much as you like to any man;<sup>30</sup> what can be sweeter than this light of day? Yet if Paul hadn’t lost it, he wouldn’t have received the eternal light. “He believed out of necessity.” What was he afraid of, will someone please tell me, what was he afraid of? The hue and cry raised by the sheep? Sheep can bleat, they can’t bite. He could, though, in the very bleating of the sheep have observed the glory of God, and begun to fear the judgment of God. Somehow or other he was roused from sleep, to observe that the things which had been foretold about Christ were fulfilled in Christ. He could have said in his heart that his gods had been defeated in him, that he had been forsaken by his gods; that only the name of Christ, that only the glory of Christ could prevail. And so, in a word, I am saying to your graces, I am addressing the Church, addressing the people of God: If he believed, it’s you that have found him; if he was afraid, it’s you that have overawed him.

*The conversion of Faustinus entirely the work of Christ*

11. Meanwhile, brothers and sisters, let us not go beyond what is in our power as human beings, and lay claim to what has not been granted us. The apostle says, *Receive the one weak in faith, not in judgments about thoughts* (Rom 14:1). Let us not claim to judge the thoughts of others; but let us present our prayers to God, even for those about whom perhaps we have some doubts. Perhaps he, in his newness, has some doubts about something; love him all the more with his doubts, with your love remove the doubts from the heart of the weak brother. Meanwhile, look at his face,<sup>31</sup> about which you should be rejoicing; commit his heart, for which you should be praying, to God.

You should know that he has been abandoned by the bad people; let him be taken up by you. Love the man more than you previously hated his error; because even then, when you were shouting against him, you were really looking for him. Don’t assume you shouted in vain; and rejoice that the one you were looking for has been found. “Who did this and that?” Faustinus. “Who did that and the other?” Faustinus. “Who was against Christ?” Faustinus.



Who has come to fear Christ? Faustinus. That's how Christ came to heal the sick, about which we have heard the gospel say, that *the doctor is not needed by the healthy, but by those who are ill* (Lk 5:31); and, *Who is the man, that when he has lost one sheep, won't he leave the ninety-nine in the mountains, and go looking for the one which had got lost? And when he finds it, he rejoices over it. In the same way my Father rejoices over one person repenting, more than over ninety-nine just people for whom there is no need of repentance* (Lk 15:4-7). That is definitely the way Christ came to heal the sick, that's the way he knew how to avenge himself of his enemies. These, his old companions in error, are perhaps sick at heart, and angry for a moment; perhaps later on they will imitate him.

And so, brothers and sisters, we entrust him to your prayers, and to your love, and to your most loyal friendship, and to your support for his weakness. As you go ahead, so he will follow. Teach him the good road, let him find the good road in you. Now that he has become a Christian, let him observe what difference there is between what he has left behind and what he has discovered. The time to come will prove the quality of his life, and of his zeal for the faith of Christ.

*The cry was, "Pagans should not have authority over Christians."  
Faustinus says, "I do not want to be mayor; I want to be a Christian"*

12. But now, my brothers and sisters, there was no necessity, and it was not the advice of the pastors, to turn him away as he knocked, to put him off as he sought. To wish to pass judgment on the hidden motives of the heart, and not to accept the clear statements of the voice, was no part either of our advice or our decision.<sup>32</sup> We are well aware, you see, of the threats made by that merciful greed of the Lord's, everywhere seeking a profitable return on his money, and saying to the lazy servant who wished to pass judgment on something he couldn't see,<sup>33</sup> *Wicked servant, out of your own mouth I condemn you. You said I am a difficult man, reaping where I have not sown, gathering where I have not scattered.* So you knew all about my greed. You, then, should have given my money to the stockbrokers; I, when I came, would have demanded it with interest (Lk 19:22-23). We, then, could only lay out our Lord's money; he is the one who will demand the interest on it, not only from this man, but from all of us. So let us carry out the office of investors, and not push ourselves into the place of collectors of interest.<sup>34</sup>

Brothers and sisters, the deed that has been enacted before your very eyes is not our doing, but God's. We bishops didn't plan and set up what has happened, because we didn't even have any hopes of it; both your and our intention was quite different. You know what cry was raised here, you know it well enough: "That pagans should not be mayors,<sup>35</sup> that pagans should not have authority over Christians." That's what was said; and because this is an invidious name,<sup>36</sup> much of the shouting under this name was done by Christians out of a *zeal for God's house* (Ps 69:9; Jn 2:17); and the entire and only intention was that a pagan should not exercise authority over Christians. That the one, however, whom all

the shouting was about, should become a Christian, wasn't so much as thought of by Christians; but it was being organized by Christ. Truly this was fulfilling what is written: *Many are the thoughts in the heart of a man; but the plan of God abides for ever* (Prov 19:21). This plan was hidden; hidden, but on the point of being carried out. Human beings were doing what they could; but Faustinus came out from Christ's mint a new banker.<sup>37</sup>

And so, brothers and sisters, keep God's work in mind. You were looking for one thing, arranging for one thing—you have found another. We are commending our Lord's work to you, we his servants to you our fellow servants. Let us love in it what our Lord has done, more than what we wanted to do; after all, the Lord's works are rather better than ours. And we all heard this man's words, said loudly and devoutly: "I don't want to be mayor; I want to be a Christian." Rejoice, exult, love more than you hated. Commend his own work to Christ in your prayers. Show a faithful, kindly, friendly spirit to an old man's first faltering steps.<sup>38</sup> What difference does it make, after all, that as you can see, he is of a somewhat advanced age?<sup>39</sup> He has come into the vineyard at the ninth hour; he is going to receive equal wages with the rest of us.<sup>40</sup>

*The feast of the birth of Saint John the Baptist*

13. Let me now refresh the memory of your graces about a Christian day; although it's impossible that you should have forgotten about it. But I'm impressing it upon you, because the pagans too, and the ungodly, for their own different and now somewhat dated reasons, yes even the pagans consider that they are celebrating this same day, this Christian solemnity.<sup>41</sup> They do it wrongly, wickedly, miserably; but how many there are who need to be liberated from all that, you can see with your own eyes. These things will get out of date; but don't lend them your assistance, distance yourselves from them, you for your part seek divine celebrations. We are going to celebrate Saint John's day, John the Baptist, the Lord's forerunner, the friend of the bridegroom,<sup>42</sup> with complete chastity, with total sobriety. They, when they notice you with surprise diverging from their enjoyments, little by little in that way follow your example; and all that stuff will become dated, and disappear.

Listen to the prophet, and see how what was foretold is being fulfilled, is being carried out: *Listen to me, you who know judgment*—it's the prophet Isaiah, it's God speaking through him. *Listen to me, you who know judgment; my people in whose hearts is my law. Do not fear the taunts of men, and do not be overwhelmed by their slander; and do not think it matters that they scorn you. For just like a garment, so shall they wear out, and like wool by moth shall they be eaten up. But my justice abides for ever* (Is 51:7-8). So cast care to the winds, brothers and sisters, yes certainly, cast care to the winds. They are getting dated, they're decreasing; they will be finished soon, either by believing, or by dying. However much noise they make, however much they thrust themselves forward with their carnal fun and games, however much they gabble their own disgraceful ditties and dance to them against Christ's divine songs, there are fewer of

them today than there were yesterday. And so, brothers and sisters, as I said, we shall be celebrating tomorrow, in the Lord's name, the feast of Saint John the Baptist. In seven days' time, that is on Saturday, we shall also be celebrating the birthday of the holy martyrs Peter and Paul.

### NOTES

1. More precisely Sunday, 23 June 401, a week after Sermon 24, and the day before Sermon 288 on the Birth of John the Baptist. This dating has been established beyond any possibility of doubt by Morin, Kunzelmann and Lambot. For a succinct presentation of their arguments, see *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin* by O. Perler, pages 233-234. Sermon 24 shows what a dramatic time it was in Carthage, with tension between Christians and pagans running high.

This sermon, it seems, is really two sermons. The one on Saint Paul ends with section 9, where the Maurists conclude it with the conventional prayer, "Turning to the Lord," etc. Sections 10 to 13, on the conversion of a certain Faustinus, may have been added on at the end, on receipt of a message from Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, or have been preached later in the day; either at the end of the Mass, or in the afternoon.

2. It is not until halfway through section 4 that we get a quotation from the apostle: Rom 8:18. Was that the passage he was referring to here?

3. See Phil 3:5.

4. See Acts 7:58. A very rhetorical argument to prove that the accessory to the act is more blameworthy than the principal! I trust no judge would be persuaded by it.

5. Only at the end of section 9 does he apply this text, very casually, to what comes between.

6. See Acts 9:8.

7. See Phil 3:7-11.

8. See Sermon 175, section 8, note 15. That was in all probability preached some ten to twelve years later than this one; so nobody like Saint Jerome had corrected Augustine's fantasy in the meantime. With this sermon in front of us, in fact, the suspicion begins to cross my mind that he quite brazenly invented this "meaning" of the name Ananias, in order to be able to talk of the wolf (scriptural warrant, Gn 49:27) being brought to the sheep for healing and transformation.

9. See Sermon 24, 4.

10. See Wis 2:12-20.

11. The Church is his glory, and we see it over all the earth.

12. Reading *quanquam* instead of the text's *tanquam*, which makes it a plain statement: But he says it as if raging.

13. In the Latin he says more simply, *Saulus a Saule*, because following the Greek, his Latin Bible puts the New Testament Saul into the second declension, the Old Testament Saul into the third (the Greek actually leaves him undeclinable).

14. See 1 Sm 9:18-26.

15. The Latin word *paulus* means small, or little. It was a surname (nickname would perhaps be more accurate) of the Roman Aemilian clan.

16. What he says and illustrates is that *paulus* means the same as *modicus*. I have had to paraphrase, and omit.

17. Not another text, unless, possibly, in his version the previous verse, 15:8. He may perhaps also have had 1 Cor 4:9 at the back of his mind.

18. See Mk 5:27-29; see also Sermons 63A, 63B.

19. See 1 Pt 5:6.

20. See Ps 57:5.11.
21. The sermon was being preached at a time of great tension between Christians and pagans in Carthage. See Sermon 24, note 1.
22. See Mk 9:38.
23. It is very hard to see the bearing of this last remark.
24. A play on words: . . . *nisi sanguis manaret . . . chirographum maneret.*
25. See, by way of contrast, Ps 27:13.
26. Reading *si* instead of the text's *etsi*, even if, which would rather spoil the force of what he is saying. An easy slip, or unintelligent correction, for a copyist to make.
27. This is where the sermon ended, according to many manuscripts followed by the Maurists, with the conventional prayer, "Turning to the Lord" etc. Whether what follows was preached immediately after the main sermon, or somewhat later during the same celebration, or later in the day, it was evidently preached entirely *ex tempore*, off the cuff.
- It may perhaps help the reader if we here try to reconstruct the occasion for it, having only the text itself to go on. Faustinus was evidently a leading citizen, and known as a pagan, and he may have been a member of the delegation that had complained to the proconsul about the way the image of Hercules had been treated. Just possibly he was, to put it in modern and of course anachronistic terms, running for municipal office. And either during this service, or sometime during the previous few days, since the preaching of Sermon 24, the Christians had been shouting against Faustinus in particular, that they didn't want pagans enjoying office, and exercising authority over them. Then Faustinus goes to Aurelius, the bishop of Carthage, and says he wants to become a Christian, and he is brought into the basilica, and word gets around, and objections are raised. But Aurelius had consulted the other bishops, who were present in Carthage for a synod, and they had advised him to accept Faustinus, and not to question his sincerity. To quell the obvious discontent of the people, or of some of them, Aurelius begs Augustine to talk to them about it.
28. Aurelius, who was, incidentally, a lifelong friend and admirer of Augustine.
29. It is in the next section that we learn his name was Faustinus.
30. Suggesting improper inducements, as well as compulsion, or necessity, to believe.
31. Faustinus was perhaps up near the sanctuary. He was presumably not being baptized on this occasion, but being formally admitted as a catechumen.
32. This suggests that Aurelius had consulted the other bishops about the case.
33. His master's hidden motives.
34. Which we do by passing rash judgments on people, and requiring them to account to us for their behavior, as many of the congregation were doing, it seems, with poor Faustinus.
35. *Majores*. Shortly Faustinus will be quoted as saying *Majoratum nolo*. So perhaps this is the earliest use of the word *major* to mean "mayor," or some equivalent! But as *majores* is in the plural, and cities, even huge cities like Carthage, usually only have one mayor, perhaps it should be translated by "aldermen."
36. The name "pagan" presumably, not the name Faustinus.
37. What normally comes out of a mint (*officina* in the Latin) is a new coin. Augustine is being deliberately paradoxical. His word for banker, *argentarius*, is much closer in sound to "money," *argentum*, than the English word "banker."
- All Christians are Christ's bankers, from whom he will demand, or exact, his own with interest. The bishops and clergy are in addition his servants, whose task it is to invest his money in the banks, with the bankers, by preaching his gospel to Christians, actual or potential.
38. Show this spirit *rudimentis senis*. But the *rudimentis* could be referring to Faustinus starting, with the newest catechumens, to learn the rudiments of the faith.
39. This is clearly what it means. But the Latin is very peculiar, and I may have missed some nuance: *Quid interest enim, quis videtis jam provectam aetatem?* The word *quis*, so Lewis and Short inform us, could also be a form for *quibus*, dative plural of the relative pronoun, as well as being ordinarily the masculine nominative singular of the interrogative, "who?" I wonder if it could also be a dialect form of the genitive singular *cujus*, or the dative singular *cui*, of the relative; which is in fact what I have rather freely translated.

40. See Mt 20:1-16.

41. The pagans were no doubt celebrating the midsummer solstice by uproarious rites round bonfires.

42. See Mk 1:2; Jn 3:29.

## SERMON 280

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYRS PERPETUA AND FELICITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### NOTES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10. A reference again to Perpetua's dream.

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

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

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

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

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

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

17. See Wis 9:15.

18. See Lk 16:19-24.

19. See Lk 20:36.

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

21. See Jn 10:15.

22. A pious commonplace borrowed from Tertullian.

## SERMON 281

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYRS PERPETUA AND FELICITY

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

*Christ victorious in Perpetua and Felicity*

1. Both the merits and the names of Perpetua and Felicity, God's holy servants, shine out brightly and pre-eminently among their fellow martyrs. A more splendid crown, I mean, is owed to those of the weaker sex, because a manly spirit has clearly done much more in women,<sup>2</sup> when their feminine frailty has not been undone under such enormous pressure. They had done well to cling to one man, to whom the one Church is presented as a chaste virgin.<sup>3</sup> They had done well, I say, to cling to that man, from whom they had drawn the strength to withstand the devil; with the result that women knocked out the enemy, who through woman had knocked out man.<sup>4</sup>

The one who had made himself weak for them was shown to be undefeated in them. The one who had *emptied himself* (Phil 2:7) in order<sup>5</sup> to sow them, filled them with courage in order to reap them. The one who for their sake had heard abusive accusations, made them worthy to receive these honorable citations. The one who for their sake was willing mercifully to be born of a woman, enabled these women to die faithfully like men.

*How Perpetua overcame the devil, trying to weaken her resolve through the tearful pleas of her father*

2. The devout mind, though, is delighted to behold such a spectacle as the blessed Perpetua tells us was revealed to her about herself; how she was turned into a man, and took on the devil.<sup>6</sup> By that contest, to be sure, she too was hastening to *mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph 4:13). That old and crafty enemy had once, of course, beguiled a man through a woman; so in order to let slip no opportunity of treachery, and because he sensed that this woman was reacting to him in a manly way, he very sensibly tried to overcome her through a man. And it was not her husband he introduced into the ring, because she was already, in her exaltation of spirit, living in heaven, and the slightest suspicion of carnal desire, would make her,

for very shame, all the stronger. Instead, it was her father whom he equipped with beguiling words, hoping that a religious spirit which would not be softened by the promptings of pleasure, might be broken by the attack of family duty and feeling.

Saint Perpetua, however, answered her father with such moderation, that she neither violated the commandment by which honor is owed to parents,<sup>7</sup> nor yielded to the tricks which the real enemy was practicing. Beaten at every turn, he caused her father to be beaten with a stick; so that while she had ignored his words, she would at least grieve at his lashes.<sup>8</sup> She, though, did indeed grieve at the insult offered her aged parent; and while she did not give him her consent, she kept her affection for him undiminished. What she hated in him was his folly, not his nature; his unbelief, not her roots. Thus she earned all the greater glory by resolutely rejecting the bad advice of such a beloved father, considering that she could not see him thrashed without feeling the pain herself. In fact that pain in no way undermined the strength of her resolve, and also added to the renown of her sufferings. *For those who love God, you see, all things work together for good (Rom 8:28).*

*Felicity gives birth in prison,  
and so joins her companions in martyrdom*

3. As for Felicity, she was pregnant when imprisoned. In giving birth, she testified with her woman's voice to her woman's condition. The punishment of Eve was not missing,<sup>9</sup> but the grace of Mary was at hand. The debt owed by the woman was exacted, but the one whom the virgin bore was there to give relief. At last the child was born, a month prematurely.<sup>10</sup> It was the work of God, that the womb should lay down its burden at what was not its proper time, so that the honor of martyrdom might not be deferred from what was its proper time. It was, I repeat, the work of God that the baby should be born on a day when it was not due, as long as Felicity was given back to such a great company to whom she was due; otherwise, if she had not been with them, it would seem not only that the martyrs were missing a companion, but also that they were missing their martyrs' reward.<sup>11</sup>

You see, the names of both women were the same as the reward of all the martyrs. I mean to say, why do martyrs endure all that they do, if not in order to revel in perpetual felicity? So these women were called what everyone is called to. And that's why, although there was a very large team<sup>12</sup> engaged in that contest, it is by the names of these two that the eternal bliss of them all is signified, and the annual festival of them all is notified.

## NOTES

1. For background, see Sermon 280, note 1. There is no reason to suppose that this sermon, any more than Sermon 280, was preached anywhere else but in Augustine's own diocese of Hippo Regius. I would be inclined to date it a little later than that sermon—any time between 405 and 410.
2. Reading *in feminis* instead of the text's *in feminas*, which I take to be either a scribal error or an editorial misprint.
3. See 2 Cor 11:2.
4. See Gn 3:1-6.
5. Supplying an *ut* which seems to have dropped out of the text before *seminaret*; to read now *qui eas ut seminaret, semetipsum exinanivit*.
6. See Sermon 280, note 4.
7. See Ex 20:12.
8. Wordplay: *ut cujus verba contempserat, saltem verbera condoleret*. When the prisoners were brought before the magistrate, Perpetua's father tried to pull her down from the platform on which they were paraded, and on the magistrate's instructions he was slashed across the face and pushed away by one of the court attendants.
9. See Gn 3:16.
10. See Sermon 280, note 1. "A month prematurely" is a very bald translation of his more elaborate paradox: *immaturo mense maturus*, which I am totally at a loss how to reproduce in English.
11. That is, their felicity.
12. Six altogether, I think; three other male catechumens and Saturus their catechist.

## SERMON 282

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYRS PERPETUA AND FELICITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### NOTES

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

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

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



## SERMON 283

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYRS OF MARSEILLES

Date: 414<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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

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

*Contenance and patience both gifts of God,  
and to be recognized as such*

2. But it's not enough to be warned, unless you also obtain assistance. So this psalm here which we have been singing,<sup>3</sup> has been teaching us that our patience in the face of pains certainly comes from God. Where can we find that our continence too, which we need against pleasures, also comes from him? You have the plainest proof here: *And since I knew*, he says, *that nobody can be continent unless God grants it; and this too was a matter of wisdom, to know whose gift this was* (Wis 8:21).

So if you have something from God, and don't know who you have it from, you won't be gifted, because you remain ungrateful. If you don't know who you get it from, you don't give thanks; by not giving thanks, you lose even what you have. *For the one who has, to him shall be given*. What is having, in the complete sense? Knowing where you have it from. *But the one who does not have, that is, who doesn't know where he has it from, even what he does have shall be taken away from him* (Mk 4:25). Finally, as the same author says, *this too was a matter of wisdom, to know whose gift this was*.

*The difference between having the spirit of this world  
and the Spirit of God*

3. In the same way the apostle Paul also said, when he was commending the grace of God to us in the Holy Spirit. *We, however, have not received the spirit of this world, but the Spirit which is from God*.<sup>4</sup> And as though he were asked, "How do you tell the difference?" he went on to add, *that we may know what things have been bestowed on us by God* (1 Cor 2:12). So the Spirit of God is a Spirit of charity; the spirit of this world a spirit of self-esteem. Those who have the spirit of this world are proud, are ungrateful to God. Many people have his gifts, but do not worship him, though they have them from him; that's why they are unhappy. Sometimes one person has greater gifts, another has lesser ones, for example intelligence, memory. These are gifts of God. You will sometimes find a person of extremely sharp wits, with astonishing, incredible powers of memory; you will find another of little intelligence, and a poor memory, but endowed with both to a small degree. But the first is proud, the second humble; this one giving thanks to God for his small gifts, that one attributing the greater ones to himself.

The one who gives thanks to God for small gifts is incomparably better than the one who prides himself on great ones. You see, the one who gives thanks for little things is admitted by God to great things, whereas the one who doesn't give thanks for great things, loses even what he has. *For the one who has, to him shall be given; but the one who does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him* (Mk 4:25). How can he not have, if he has? He has without having, if he doesn't know where he has it from. God, you see, takes back what is his, and the man is left with his own iniquity.

So: *Nobody is continent, unless God grants it*. You have a gift to protect you

against pleasures; since *this was itself a matter of wisdom, to know whose gift this was; nobody is continent, unless God grants it* (Wis 8:21). You have a gift to help you against pains: since *it is from him*, he says, *my patience comes* (Ps 62:5). So *hope in him, every council of the people* (Ps 62:8). Hope in him, don't trust in your own powers. Confess your bad things to him, hope for your good things from him. Without his help you will be nothing, however proud you may be. So in order that you may be enabled to be humble, *pour out your hearts before him*; and to avoid remaining wrongly stuck in yourselves, say what comes next: *God is our helper* (Ps 62:8).

*The difference between patience and obstinate insensitivity*

4. The blessed martyr whom we are admiring, whose feast we are celebrating today, had this helper, in order to be victorious.<sup>5</sup> Without him, he wouldn't be victorious. Even if he were victorious over pain, he wouldn't be victorious over the devil. Sometimes, you see, people conquered by the devil conquer pain; they don't have patience, what they have is obstinate insensitivity. So that helper was present, to give the martyr true faith, to make a good cause for him, to grant him patience for the sake of the good cause. Only then, you see, is it real patience, when it is preceded by a good cause. Faith itself, after all,<sup>6</sup> is not given by anybody else but God.

The apostle insisted in a few words that each of them, both the cause for which we are to suffer and the patience with which we are to endure evils, comes to us from God. In encouraging us to be martyrs, he said, *Because to you it has been granted for Christ's sake*. There you have the good cause, *for Christ's sake*; if<sup>7</sup> for the sake of some sacrilege, it's against Christ; if for heresy and schism, it's against Christ. Christ said himself, after all, *whoever does not gather with me, scatters* (Lk 11:23). So: *To you*, he says, *it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him* (Phil 1:29). That is true patience. So let us value this patience, let us hold on to it fast; and if we haven't got it yet, let us ask for it. And then we can honestly sing, *My soul will submit itself to God, since it is from him that my patience comes* (Ps 62:5).

### NOTES

1. Fischer and Kunzelmann propose between 412 ad 416. But it is a sermon, if not of doubtful authenticity, then at least of doubtful integrity. The assertion that it is preached about the martyrs of Marseilles is made, indeed, in the venerable florilegia of Bede and Florus. But as the Maurist editors point out, all the manuscripts are lectionaries, which in view of their proper liturgical function quite happily adapt patristic readings to particular feasts. And while most of these manuscripts, like Bede and Florus, attach this sermon to the feast of the martyrs of Marseilles (9 April according to the Maurists, 22 July according, apparently, to Fischer and Kunzelmann), an old lectionary of the abbey of Saint Germain gives this as one of the sermons on Saint Vincent, suitable to be read in the

refectory (perhaps because it doesn't contain any gory details of martyrdom). The Maurists also point out that the last section mentions only a single, unnamed martyr being celebrated, who may well have been Saint Vincent. There are several similarities with Sermon 276 on that saint. The text certainly gives the impression of being a bit of a patchwork, the lectionary compilers taking snippets from here and there; so perhaps it isn't even a sermon, but extracts from several sermons.

2. Punning on *mundus/immundus: pro mundi amoribus, immo pro immundis amoribus.*

3. Ps 62.

4. In the reading that had preceded Ps 62. From what he goes on to say in the next section, one may deduce it was 1 Cor 2. Some manuscripts, followed by the editors of the text being translated here, but not by the Maurists, leave out what the apostle Paul said.

5. It is this sentence, this whole section, that lends support to the attribution by the monks of Saint Germain of this sermon to the feast of Saint Vincent.

6. Which is the good cause.

7. Here the Maurists and other editors add *non*, giving the sense, "not for some sacrilege against Christ, or for heresy and schism against Christ." But there is no manuscript support for this, and the manuscript reading, though difficult, can be made sense of.

## SERMON 284

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYRS MARIANUS AND JAMES

Date: 418<sup>1</sup>

*The patience of the martyrs a gift from God*

1. Today the time has come, by the grace of God, for me to pay my debt.<sup>2</sup> So since the debtors are committed to payment, why are the debt collectors making such a noise? If we have everyone quiet and calm of mind, then what I am paying back can reach everyone. What is owing to you is a sermon on the passion and the glory of the holy martyrs. So, as they suffered so gloriously, they are enjoining patience upon us. So they for their part endured howling mobs; let us in our turn have the pleasure of a quiet and acquiescent congregation, because we can see that it is certainly a believing one.<sup>3</sup> The constancy of the martyrs is certainly something to be praised; but what eloquence would ever suffice to praise it? When can I fulfill by speaking what has already been done in your hearts by believing?

Where though did such a great gift as this patience of theirs come from? Where else, but from where comes *every best gift*? Where does the best gift come from, but from where the perfect gift comes? That, you see, is how it is written there too: *But patience has a perfect work. Every best gift, he says, and every perfect gift is coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change, nor shadow of movement* (Jas 1:4.17). Into changeable human minds patience comes down from the unchangeable fount, to make them unchangeable also. Where can humanity get the power to please God from, except from God? Where can humanity get the power to live a good life from, except from *the fountain of life*? Where can humanity get enlightenment from, except from the eternal light? *For with you, he says, is the fountain of life.* "It's with you," he says. "I could have said, From me; but if I say, From me, I move away from you." So *with you is the fountain of life. In your light, not in our own; in your light we shall see light* (Ps 36:9). So, *approach him, and be enlightened* (Ps 34:5). He is the fountain of life; approach, drink. He is light; approach, receive it, and see. If he doesn't pour anything into you, you will be bone dry.

*The martyr Marianus, and his mother Mary*

2. So it's from here then, from here that our martyrs drank; from here they were made so drunk,<sup>4</sup> that they did not recognize their nearest and dearest. How many holy martyrs, I mean to say, as the time for them to suffer drew near, were tempted by the coaxing of their nearest and dearest, striving to call them back to the temporal, and vain, and fleeting sweetness of this life?<sup>5</sup> But they in their thirst had drunk from that fountain which is with God, and had become quite drunk. In their confession of faith they were belching Christ, paying no attention to their relations according to the flesh, who were drunk on the wine of error, who were loving them in a bad way, and arguing persuasively to call them back from life; they didn't even recognize them.

Not of their sort, however, was the mother of Marianus, not of their sort with their misguided attempts to persuade, their pleading of close kinship in the flesh, their misplaced way of loving; not of their sort was Saint Marianus' mother. She bore a by no means insignificant name, it was not for nothing she was called Mary. It's true, she had given birth as a woman, not as a virgin, not by the Holy Spirit as a maiden, but still by her husband as a chaste wife; but she had given birth to such a marvelous pledge of love, whom she accompanied with her encouragement to his glorious passion, instead of trying to deflect him from it with her misguided pleas.

Yes, you too, Mary, are holy, not your namesake's equal of course in merit, but her equal in desire. Blessed are you also. She gave birth to the Prince of martyrs, you gave birth to a martyr of the Prince. She bore the Judge of witnesses, you bore a witness to the Judge. A blessed childbirth, an even more blessed mother love. When you gave birth to him, you groaned; when you lost him you leapt for joy. What's that: when you gave birth to him, you groaned, you leapt for joy when you lost him? It wasn't for nothing; but only because in fact you didn't lose him. Where there was no grief, there was faith. Spiritual faith had excluded grief according to the flesh from your heart. You could see that you were not losing your son, but sending him on ahead.<sup>6</sup> The whole reason for your joy was that you were eager to follow.

*It is from God my patience comes. It is mine, but not from me*

3. All this amazes us, we are full of praise for it, we love it. Please, blessed martyrs, where do you get all this from? I know you have human hearts; where do you get this divine power from? I say, "From God"; who is going to say, "From yourselves"?<sup>7</sup> Who, by misguidedly praising you, is going to grudge you your triumph? Is goodness knows who saying that you get all this from yourselves? Answer him, *In the Lord shall my soul be praised*. Is goodness knows who saying you get all this from yourselves? Answer him, if you are gentle, answer, *In the Lord shall my soul be praised*. Give this answer too in the presence of the people of God: *Let the gentle hear and be glad* (Ps 34:2). Is goodness knows who saying that you get all this from yourselves? Answer him, *A person cannot receive anything at all unless it has been given him from above* (Jn 3:27).

After all, it is to us and to you that the Lord Jesus says, *Without me you can do nothing* (Jn 15:5). *Without me*, he says, *you can do nothing*; it was to you as well that this was said; acknowledge the words of the pastor, beware the flattery of the deceiver. That pride, godless, wicked, ungrateful, I know how it displeases you. Holy martyrs, you suffered for Christ's sake; but the fact that you suffered was to your advantage, not Christ's. Think what you would have lacked if it hadn't been granted you. Thrust away from your ears these poison drops of the enemy. That's the tongue that said, *You will be like gods* (Gn 3:5).

It was ungrateful free will that hurled man down; let the liberated will<sup>8</sup> now say to the Lord, *O Lord, the patience of Israel* (Jer 17:13). Why this pride, unbeliever? Why praise the patience of the martyrs, as if they could possibly be patient on their own? Listen rather to the apostle, the *teacher of the nations* (2 Tm 1:11), not the deceiver of unbelievers. Do you really praise the patience the martyrs showed for Christ's sake, and ascribe it to them on their own? Listen rather to the apostle addressing the martyrs, and calming all human hearts. Listen, I repeat, to him saying, *Because to you it has been granted for Christ's sake*. Listen to piety encouraging, not to flattery deceiving. *To you*, he says, *it has been granted*. It has been granted; listen. *To you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him* (Phil 1:29). *To you it has been granted*; what can be added to this sentence? *To you it has been granted*; acknowledge that it has been granted, or you may lose it as having been grabbed. *To you*, he says, *it has been granted for Christ's sake*. To do what for the sake of Christ, if not to suffer? But there's no need for you to guess; listen to what follows: *not only to believe in him*, because that too has been granted, but it isn't the only thing that has been granted; *but also to suffer for him*; this has been granted as well.

Let the martyr turn his back on the unbelieving and ungrateful flatterer; let him turn his face toward the most generous of bountiful givers, and impute his very martyrdom to God, not treating it as something he has offered to God from what is his own. Let him say instead, *In the Lord shall my soul be praised; let the gentle hear and be glad* (Ps 34:2). And when you say to him, "What do you mean, *In the Lord shall my soul be praised*?" So isn't it being praised in yourself?"<sup>9</sup>—he comes back with, *Shall not my soul subject itself to God? For it is from him that my patience comes* (Ps 62:5). So why is it mine? Because I opened my lap, and was happy to receive it; it's from him, and it's mine. Both from him, and also mine; and because it's from him, it's mine all the more safely. It's mine, but it doesn't come to me from myself. In order really to possess my gift, I acknowledge God as the giver. Because if I don't acknowledge God as the giver, God takes away his good thing, and there only remains my bad thing, through my choice, through my free will.

*Observe what the martyrs desired:  
"One thing have I sought from the Lord"*

4. The faithful, reliable scripture says, *God made man upright, and they themselves have sought out many ideas* (Eccl 7:29). *God*, he says, *made man*

*upright, and they themselves; how themselves, if not by free will? And they themselves have sought out many ideas. He had said he was made upright, and yet he didn't go on to say "And they themselves have sought out crooked ideas," by way of contrast because he had said upright; or wicked ideas; but he just said many. It's with this multitude that the body which is perishing weighs down the soul, and the earthly habitation presses on the mind that thinks up many ideas (Wis 9:15).*

May God deliver us from this multitude of human thoughts and ideas, and deliver us to the one,<sup>10</sup> so that from being a multitude we might be one in him.<sup>11</sup> May he fuse us together with the fire of charity, so that with one heart we follow the one, so that we don't fall away from the one into the many, and by leaving the one get scattered among the many. It's about this one thing,<sup>12</sup> you see, that the apostle was speaking, when he said, *Brothers, I do not consider myself to have apprehended; what? One thing, though; what one thing? Forgetting those things that lie behind, stretched out to the things that lie ahead, I follow* (Phil 3:13). One thing I follow; one thing, he says, I follow. But I don't consider myself to have apprehended, because the body which is perishing presses on the mind which thinks up many ideas.

There you have where the martyrs were going; being full of fervor, they didn't care at all about the howling mob.<sup>13</sup> Notice what the martyrs desired: *One thing, he says, have I sought from the Lord. One thing have I sought; I'm saying goodbye, he says, to the many things of this age. One thing have I sought; one blessedness, of course, one happiness, one true one, not many false ones. One thing, he says, have I sought from the Lord, this is what I shall look for. What is this one thing? That I may live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. Why this? That I may contemplate the delights of the Lord* (Ps 27:4).

When the holy martyrs thought about that delight, then all the evil and bitter and harsh things they suffered seemed totally insignificant. It was a case of delight against delight; a case of delight against pain. That delight was fighting against each, against the world both as raging and as coaxing. Its answer to the world was, "What are you trying to coax me with? What I love is sweeter than anything you can promise. I hear God saying to me, or rather holy scripture, *How great is the multitude of your sweetness, Lord, which you have hidden away for those who fear you!*" (Ps 31:19). There you have a multitude again, but a good one, because not torn by dissension, but in the one.

*The two sorts of temptation, by blandishments and by terror, illustrated in the case of the Lord, the Prince of martyrs*

5. So it's not surprising, my brothers and sisters—you know the place in the Mass where the martyrs' names are recited? The Church doesn't pray for them. Yes, the Church is quite right to pray for the other departed who have fallen asleep; but for the martyrs it does not pray, but instead commends itself to their prayers. They strove against sin, after all, to the shedding of their blood. They fulfilled what is written, *Strive for the sake of truth even to death* (Sir 4:28).



They despised the things the world promises. But that's little enough; I mean, it's little enough to despise death, little enough to endure harsh treatment. It's where the struggle is fought to the shedding of blood, it's there that the most glorious and complete victory is won.

Because the first temptations that were put to our Lord, the Prince of martyrs, were blandishments. *Tell these stones to become bread. To you will I give all these kingdoms. Let us see if the angels hold you up; because it is written, Lest perhaps you dash your foot against a stone* (Lk 4:3.6.11). These are the joys of the world: in bread you have *the lust of the flesh*; in the promise of kingdoms *the ambition of the age*; in the appeal to curiosity,<sup>14</sup> *the lust of the eyes*; *all these are from the world* (1 Jn 2:16). But they allure, they don't rage. Notice the martyrs' leader offering examples of various contests,<sup>15</sup> and in his mercy helping the contestants. Why did he permit himself to be tempted, if not to teach us how to resist the tempter? The world promises the pleasures of the flesh; answer it: "God is more delightful than that." The world promises secular honors and high office; answer it: "The kingdom of God is higher than all that." The world promises superfluous, even damnable spectacles to our curiosity; answer it: "God's truth alone does not err."<sup>16</sup>

When the Lord had been tempted with this triple temptation—because in all the allurements of the world these three are to be found, either pleasure, or curiosity, or pride—what did the evangelist say? *After the devil had concluded every temptation; every kind, but of the alluring sort. There remained the other sort of temptation, by harsh and hard treatment, savage treatment, by atrocious and ferocious treatment; yes, there remained the other sort of temptation. The evangelist knew this, knew what had been carried out, what remained, and so he said, After the devil had completed every temptation, he departed from him until the time* (Lk 4:13). He departed from him, in the form, that is, of the *insidious serpent* (Gn 3:1); he is going to come in the form of the *roaring lion* (1 Pt 5:8). But the one who *will trample on the lion and the dragon* (Ps 91:13) will conquer him. He will return; he will enter into Judas, will make him betray his master;<sup>17</sup> he will bring along the Jews, not flattering now,<sup>18</sup> but raging; taking possession of his own instruments, he will cry out with the tongues of all of them, *Crucify him, crucify him!* (Lk 23:21). That Christ was the conqueror there, why should we be surprised? He was almighty God.

*Christ has taught you how to suffer, and he has taught you by suffering*

6. Christ wished to suffer for us. The apostle Peter says, *He suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his footsteps* (1 Pt 2:21). He taught you how to suffer, and he taught you by suffering. Words would not be enough, unless example were added. And how, precisely, did he teach us, brothers and sisters? He was hanging on the cross, the Jews were raging; he was hanging by the harsh nails, but he never lost his gentleness. They were raging, they were barking and snarling all round him,<sup>19</sup> they were jeering at him as he hung there. He was hanging there, and healing them. *Father*, he said, *forgive*

them, because they do not know what they are doing (Lk 23:34). He was praying, and yet he continued to hang there;<sup>20</sup> he would not come down, because with his blood he was making a medicine for the frenzied mob.

Finally, the words of the Lord, who was at the same time both asking and granting the request for mercy—because he asked the Father, and with the Father granted the request; those words could not be uttered in vain. So after his resurrection he healed those whose rabid fury he had endured as he hung on the cross. He ascended into heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit. And he didn't show himself to them after the resurrection, but only to his faithful disciples, in case it should seem as if he wanted to taunt those who had killed him. It was more important to teach humility to his friends, than to cast the truth in the teeth of his enemies. He rose again; he did more than they had demanded, not in faith but in mockery, saying, *If he is the Son of God, let him come down from the cross* (Mt 27:40). He had refused to come down from the tree, instead he rose again from the tomb.

He ascended into heaven, from there he sent the Holy Spirit; he filled the disciples, dispelled their fears, gave them confidence. Peter's timidity was suddenly changed into the courage of a preacher. How could this happen to a man? Look for Peter relying on himself, you find Peter denying Jesus; look for God giving assistance, you find Peter preaching Jesus. Weakness gave way to timidity for a moment, so that self-assurance might be put in its place, not that piety might be obliterated. He fills him with his Spirit and makes him the boldest of preachers, having predicted to him in his self-assurance, *You will deny me three times* (Lk 22:34). Peter, you see, had been so sure of his own powers, relying not on God's gift, but on his own free will. He had said, you remember, *I will be with you to the death* (Lk 22:33). He had said *in his abundance, I shall never be moved*. But the one who *in his favor had endowed his beauty with strength, turned away his face, and he became dismayed* (Ps 30:6-7). The Lord, it says, turned away his face. He showed Peter to Peter; but later he looked round,<sup>21</sup> and confirmed Peter in the rock.

So, my brothers and sisters, let us imitate, as far as we can, the example of the Lord in his passion. We shall be able to carry this out if we ask him for his assistance; not by going ahead of him, like Peter in his self-assurance;<sup>22</sup> but by following him and praying to him, like Peter when he was making progress. Notice, you see, what the evangelist said, when Peter denied Jesus three times: *And the Lord looked round at him, and Peter remembered* (Lk 22:61). What's this, *looked round at him*? You see, the Lord didn't actually look round at him by literally turning his head to remind him. It's not like that; read the gospel.<sup>23</sup> The Lord was being tried in the interior of the house, Peter was being tested in the courtyard. So *the Lord looked round at him*, not in the body, but in divine majesty, not with a glance of his bodily eyes, but with his sovereign mercy. He, having *turned away his face* (Ps 30:7), looked round at him, and he became liberated. So the self-assured man would have perished, if the Redeemer had not looked round.

And lo and behold, washed clean by his own tears, rebuked and rescued,

Peter is now preaching. The one who had denied Christ is now preaching him; those who had gone astray now believe. That medicine made of the blood of the Lord now works on those who had succumbed to the frenzy of mass hysteria.<sup>24</sup> In faith they drink what they had shed in fury.

“But it’s too much for me,” he says, “to imitate the Lord.” By the grace of the Lord, then, imitate your fellow servant, imitate Stephen,<sup>25</sup> imitate Marianus and James. They were only human, they were fellow servants of yours; born just like you, but crowned by the one who was not born in that way.

### NOTES

1. So Fischer, Kunzelmann, la Bonnardière and Morin. They connect this sermon with the tailpiece of Sermon 256, and there are other small details that support their view, which will be mentioned in the notes. Lambot and Perler, however, consider that they have conclusive proof that the sermon was preached in 397, and say the reference at the end of Sermon 256 must be to another sermon on these two martyrs, now lost. Their conclusive proof, of which a succinct account can be found in Perler’s *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin*, pages 218-219, is based on the arrangement of sermons in manuscript collections. But while it is indeed cogent, it cannot be said, in my opinion, to be conclusive, and to outweigh all other considerations. All agree that the sermon was preached in Carthage, where Augustine had gone, in both years, for a Council of African bishops.

Marianus and James were clerics, martyred in 262 under the Emperors Valerian and Gallienus, in the Numidian town of Lambesa. James was a deacon, and Marianus a lector, which very probably means he was little more than a boy in his teens, the equivalent of a modern seminarian. This adds poignancy to the story about his mother.

2. If the sermon was preached on 6 May 397, then this clearly does not allude to the tailpiece attached to Sermon 256. Now in the view of Lambot and Perler, this Sermon 284 was the first of a whole series of sermons which Augustine preached in Carthage in May and June of 397. But his speaking here of a debt implies a recent promise made in a previous sermon. So this looks like a weak point in their argument, which does not allow for a previous sermon. On the other hand it is a strong argument in favor of the date 418.

3. Evidently it was rather a boisterous celebration in honor of Marianus and James. I am hesitant, and inconsistent, about how to translate the first person plural in this section. Clearly, only Augustine was paying the debt. Yet he talks of debtors in the plural. I infer that there were several bishops present, and that perhaps some of the commotion and noise was directed, in a good natured way, at all of them.

4. See Ps 36:8.

5. See Sermon 281, 2, and the account of Saint Perpetua resisting the pleas of her father.

6. Word play: *filiū non amittere, sed praemittere*.

7. Dating the sermon to 418, we can answer this rhetorical question with “The Pelagians.” He does indeed seem to have them in his sights in this section. This is yet another factor favoring the later date. Not that he would have thought any differently on the point in 397; but that the issue would not have been so obviously in the air.

8. The distinction between *arbitrium liberum* and *arbitrium liberatum*, clearly much more pointed in Latin. The traditional translation of *arbitrium* in this phrase by “will” is regrettable.

9. I have supplied a *nonne* to make the sentence read, *In te ergo nonne laudatur?* Without it, the questioner does not appear to be raising any objection at all. The martyrs’ reply begins with *Nonne*—if that could account for the *nonne* I am presuming getting omitted.

10. Reading *ad unum* instead of the text's *ab uno*, deliver us from the one. But that must be wrong. The Maurists suggest reading *levet nos ad unum* instead of *liberet nos ab uno*. My suggestion is slightly more economical.

11. See Jn 17:11.21.

12. One thing, clearly, in Paul's text; but hitherto in Augustine's just as easily one person, Christ. There is ultimately no difference.

13. *Multum strepitum*; an allusion, I imagine, to some detail of their martyrdom.

14. Reading in *curiositatis tentatione* instead of the text's *in curiositate tentationis*.

15. Reading—or at least translating—*exempla certaminis* instead of the text's *exemplorum certamina*. But perhaps I am missing an idiomatic, or at any rate idiosyncratic, way of using the genitive case. A young Mosotho friend of mine recently brought two women to see me, whom he introduced as “my wife, and my mother's wife.” I was of course puzzled; but then it was explained to me that he meant “my wife's mother.”

16. What this answer has to do with curiosity it is hard, at first sight, to understand. But curiosity, for Augustine, is a spurious, or worldly parody of *studiositas*, the study of the truth that really matters, God's truth. So curiosity often ends up, not merely with trivial discoveries, but even with false ones.

17. See Jn 13:2.

18. See Mk 12:14.

19. See Ps 22:16.

20. *Petebat, et tamen pendebat*.

21. See Lk 22:61.

22. By asserting that he was ready to lay down his life for Jesus, Jn 13:27. The other Peter, making progress in the second half of the sentence, is presumably the Peter of Jn 21:15-19.

23. Meaning, very possibly, a harmony of the gospels. It is only if you put this little episode from Luke in the context of Mark's account, or Matthew's, that it ceases, as Augustine makes out, to have been literally possible.

24. He is picking up a thread which he dropped about three paragraphs ago, at the end of the first paragraph of this section.

25. Saying *Do not charge them with this sin*, Acts 7:60.

## SERMON 285

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYRS CASTUS AND AEMILIUS

Date: 397<sup>1</sup>

*The courage of the martyrs did not come from themselves*

1. I am urged to speak to your graces by the courage of the holy martyrs, courage that was not only heroic but also dutiful—that, after all, is the useful sort of courage, or rather the only true sort, properly to be called courage, when it serves in God's army, not in that of pride. So I am urged to speak to your graces, and urge you to celebrate the feasts of the martyrs in such a way that you also take delight in imitating them by following in their footsteps. The fact, after all, that they turned out so brave was not something that derived from themselves. That source, moreover, from which they drew their courage didn't only flow as far as them. The one who gave it to them is also powerful enough to give it to us; since one price was paid for all of us.

*It is not the punishment that makes the martyr, but the cause*

2. So the thing you have particularly to be reminded of, to remind yourselves of time and again, and to think about all the time, is that it is not the punishment that makes God's martyr, but the cause. What God takes delight in, after all, is our justice, not our torments; nor is inquiry made at the judgment of the Almighty and the True, what each one of us suffers, but why. You see, what has made us sign ourselves with the cross is not the punishment inflicted on the Lord, but the cause of it. I mean, if it had been the punishment, the similar punishment of the robbers would have had the same value. Three men crucified in the same place, the Lord in the middle, because *he was reckoned among the wicked* (Is 53:12). They placed the two robbers on either side, but they didn't have a similar cause. They were flanking Christ as he hung there, but they were far removed from him in reality. They were crucified by their crimes, he by ours.

And yet in one of them too it was made clear enough what the value was, not of his agony as he hung there, but of his piety as he confessed. The robber acquired in his pain what Peter lost in his fear; he admitted his villainy, he ascended his cross; he changed his cause, he purchased paradise. He thoroughly

deserved to change his cause, because he did not dismiss Christ for suffering a similar punishment. The Jews dismissed him as he performed miracles, he believed in him as hung on the cross. He acknowledged the Lord as his fellow sufferer on the cross, and by believing in him he took the kingdom of heaven by storm.<sup>2</sup> The robber believed in Christ at the very moment when the apostle's faith was shaken with fear. Deservedly he deserved to hear, *Today you shall be with me in paradise* (Lk 23:43).

This is not indeed what he had promised himself; he was indeed commending himself to a great and generous mercy, but he was also thinking about his own deserts. *Lord*, he said, *remember me when you come into your kingdom* (Lk 23:42). Until the Lord came into his kingdom, he expected to be undergoing punishment, and he was begging for mercy to be shown him at least at his coming. In a word the robber, thinking of what he deserved, was putting his time off, while the Lord was putting the robber on<sup>3</sup> to what he had had no hopes of. It's as if he were saying, "You are asking me to remember you when I come into my kingdom: *Amen, amen I tell you, today you shall be with me in paradise*. Recognize who it is you are commending yourself to. You believe I am going to come, but even before I come, I am everywhere. That's why, although I am about to descend into hell, I have you with me in paradise today; with me, not entrusted to someone else. You see, my humility has come down to mortal human beings, and to the dead themselves, but my divinity has never departed from paradise."

Thus three crosses were made, three causes. One of the robbers was scoffing at Christ;<sup>4</sup> the other, confessing his evil deeds, was commending himself to Christ's mercy. The cross of Christ in the middle between them was not an instrument of punishment, but a judge's bench; from his cross, that is to say, he condemned the one who scoffed at him, set free the one who believed in him.<sup>5</sup> Be afraid, scoffers; rejoice, believers. He will do the same in his glory, as he did in his humility.

*The mysteries of grace and of judgment illustrated by the case of Peter*

3. God's gifts come from the depths of the divine judgment; we can marvel at them, we cannot investigate and explain them. *For who has known the mind of the Lord? and, How inscrutable are his judgments, and unsearchable his ways!* (Rom 11:34.33). Peter, following in all Christ's footsteps, is dismayed and denies; he is looked round at, and weeps; his tears wipe away what his fear had smudged him with.<sup>6</sup> That first stage did not mean deserting Peter, but educating him. Asked to love the Lord in his heart,<sup>7</sup> he had been so sure he could also die for him; he had attributed this to his own powers. Unless he were left to himself for a little by his trainer, he would not be shown up to himself. He had the effrontery to say, *I will lay down my life for you* (Jn 13:37). This man for whom Christ had not yet laid down his life to set him free, was usurping Christ's role, and boasting he would lay down his life for Christ.

To sum up, when he is overwhelmed with fear, as the Lord had predicted he

three times denies the one for whom he had promised to die. As it says, *the Lord looked round at him*; he, for his part, *wept bitterly* (Lk 22:61-62). Recollection of his denial was necessarily bitter, so that the grace of redemption might be all the sweeter. If he hadn't been left to himself, he would not have denied; if he hadn't been looked round at, he would not have wept. God hates people relying presumptuously on their own powers, and like a doctor he lances this swollen tumor in those whom he loves.<sup>8</sup> By lancing it, of course, he inflicts pain, but he also ensures health later on. And so when he rises again, the Lord entrusts his sheep to Peter, to that one who denied him; but he denied him because he relied on himself; later he would feed his flock as a pastor, because he loved him. After all why does he ask him three times about his love, if not to prick his conscience about his threefold denial?<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, Peter accomplished later on by the grace of God, what he had previously been unable to do by self-reliance. You see, after the Lord had entrusted him with his, not Peter's, sheep,<sup>10</sup> to feed them, not for himself but for the Lord, he told him about his future martyrdom, which he had forfeited the first time, because he had been in much too much of a hurry. *When you are older*, he said, *someone else will gird you, and carry you where you do not wish to go. He said this, though, to signify by what death he was going to glorify the Lord* (Jn 21:18-19). It came about, Peter arrived at his martyrdom, having washed away his denial with his tears. What had been promised him by the Savior could not be taken away from him by the tempter.

*The same sort of thing happened with the martyrs Castus and Aemilius*

4. The same sort of thing also happened, I am inclined to think, with these holy martyrs Castus and Aemilius, whose feast we are celebrating today. Perhaps they too, to begin with, relied presumptuously on their own powers, and that's why they fell away. He showed them who they really were, in themselves, and who he really was. He squashed them in their self-assurance, he called them in their faith; he came to their aid as they fought, he crowned them when they won. In a nutshell, the enemy was rejoicing over them in their first encounter, when they gave in to their pains. He reckoned they were on his side; he was already gleefully rubbing his hands, he already had them as his own—but only to the extent he was allowed to, in the Lord's merciful plan. Other martyrs conquered the devil as he tested them; these two conquered him in his very triumph.

And so, my brothers and sisters, let us remember which celebrities we are celebrating today; and let us desire to imitate them, not insofar as they were defeated, but insofar as they were victorious. That's why the fall of great men has not been hushed up, so that those who have had the presumption just to rely on themselves may learn to be afraid. On every side the humility of the good master is being most assiduously impressed upon us, seeing that our very salvation in Christ consists in the humility of Christ. There would have been no salvation for us, after all, if Christ had not been prepared to humble himself for

our sakes. Let us remember that we shouldn't have too much confidence in ourselves. Let us entrust God with whatever good qualities we have; what we have rather less of, let us implore from him.

*The martyrs are our advocates, but again in Christ, not in themselves*

5. The justice of the martyrs is perfect, because they have been perfected by their sufferings. That's why they aren't prayed for in the Church. The other faithful departed are prayed for, not the martyrs; they left the world, you see, so perfected that they are not our dependents, but our advocates. And this too, not in themselves, but in the one to whom as their head they have stuck close as his members. He, you see, is indeed the one advocate,<sup>11</sup> *who intercedes for us, seated at the right hand of the Father* (Rom 8:34); but the one advocate in the same way as the one shepherd. Because *I must*, he said, *bring those sheep too, which are not of this fold* (Jn 10:16).<sup>12</sup>

So Christ is a shepherd, Peter not a shepherd? Indeed Peter too is a shepherd, and all others like him are without the slightest doubt shepherds, pastors. I mean, if he isn't a shepherd, how can he be told, *Feed my sheep* (Jn 21:17)? But all the same, the real shepherd is the one who feeds his own sheep. Peter, you see, was not told "Feed your sheep," but "mine." So Peter is a shepherd, not in himself but in the body of the shepherd. I mean, if he were feeding his own sheep, what he was feeding would immediately turn into goats.<sup>13</sup>

*This curious point proved from the Song of Songs*

6. In contrast, you see, to what is said to Peter, *Feed my sheep*, there is what is said in the Song of Songs: *Unless you know yourself, O most beautiful among women*. We recognize, of course, to whom it's being said, and it's in her that we in fact hear this. It's the Church, in fact, which hears from Christ, the bride who hears from the bridegroom, *Unless you know yourself, O most beautiful among women, go out, you* (Sg 1:7). What terrible words, *Go out! They went out from us*, it says, *but they were not of us* (1 Jn 2:19). The opposite of this dismal utterance, *Go out*, is in a good sense those grateful words, *Enter into the joy of your Lord* (Mt 25:21.23). So: *Unless you know yourself, O most beautiful among women*, O Catholic Church beautiful among heresies, *go out, you*. I, you see, am not throwing you out, but *Go out, you*; because *they went out from us, those who separate themselves, being worldly, not having the Spirit* (Jude 19). After all, it didn't say, "They were thrown out," but *They went out*. The divine justice also followed this rule with the first sinners. You see, it was as already tumbling head first under their own weight that he let them go from paradise; he didn't shut them out.<sup>14</sup>

So, *unless you know yourself, O most beautiful among women, go out, you*. I'm not throwing you out; *go out, you*. For my part, I want you healed in my body; it's you that are determined to have your putrescent self<sup>15</sup> amputated. This was said with an eye on those who, it was foreseen, were going to go out, so



that they might recognize themselves, and take care to remain.<sup>16</sup> Why, after all, did they too go out, if not because they did not recognize themselves? If they had, I mean, they would thereby have seen that what they gave<sup>17</sup> was not their own, but God's.

"It's I that give it; what I give is mine; and that's why it's holy, because I give it."

You haven't recognized yourself; how right you were to go out! You refused, after all, to listen to him saying, *Unless you know yourself, O most beautiful among women*. Because you were beautiful once, when you were joined to the members of your bridegroom. So you refused to listen, and to weigh up what the meaning could be, of *Unless you know yourself*. Because of course he found you ugly,<sup>18</sup> because he made beauty out of your ugliness, because from being black he made you white.<sup>19</sup> *For what have you got that you did not receive?* (1 Cor 4:7).

So you didn't take note of how it was said, *Unless you know yourself, go out, you*. And you thought that you ought to feed your own sheep, not as Peter was told, *Feed my sheep* (Jn 21:17). But notice what he added for your benefit, why he predicted all this for you: *Go out, you, in the tracks of the flocks*, not of the flock, but the flocks. I mean the place where Christ's sheep are being fed is where there is *one flock and one shepherd* (Jn 10:16). So, *go out, you, in the tracks of the flocks*, being divisible, divided, torn; *go out, you, in the tracks of the flocks, and graze your goats*; not like Peter, *my sheep*, but *your goats in the tabernacles of the shepherds* (Sg 1:8), not in the tabernacle of the shepherd. Peter enters in charity; you go out in animosity. Because Peter came to know himself; that's why he wept over his presumptuously relying on himself, and deserved to find a helper; that's why *Go out, you*. He grazes *my sheep*, you *your goats*. He does it in the tabernacle of the shepherd, you *in the tabernacles of the shepherds*. So why boast about your evil punishment, since you do not have a good cause?<sup>20</sup>

*Choose yourselves a good and just cause,  
and then with the Lord's help have no fear of any punishment*

7. And so let us honor the martyrs inside, in the tabernacle of the shepherd, in the members of the shepherd, ones marked by grace, not audacity; by piety, not temerity; as steadfast, not obstinate; as gathering together, not dividing and scattering. In a word, if you wish to imitate true martyrs, choose yourselves a cause, so that you can say to the Lord, *Judge me, O Lord, and distinguish my cause from an unholy nation* (Ps 43:1). Distinguish, not my pain and punishment, because an unholy nation has that too; but my cause, which only a holy nation has. So choose yourselves a cause, hold onto a good and just cause, and with the Lord's help have no fear of any pain or punishment.

Turning to the Lord, etc.

## NOTES

1. So Lambot and Perler. The sermon is mentioned, along with others preached at this time, by Possidius in his *Index* to Augustine's works. La Bonnardière, however, suggests between 405 and 410, Kunzelmann 416.

All agree that the sermon was preached in Carthage, where Castus and Aemilius were martyred about 250, in the persecution launched by Decius. Cyprian mentions them as follows in his book on *The Lapsed*, chapter 13; PL 4, 476:

Someone who has been overcome by torture could certainly ask for forgiveness, and say: "I did indeed wish to fight bravely, and mindful of my baptism (literally, my sacrament) I took up the weapons of devotion and faith. But as I was battling in my encounter, the variety of torments and the long drawn out punishments defeated me. . . . The flesh deserted me in the struggle, the weakness of my entrails yielded, and it was not the spirit, but the body which gave in to the pain." This kind of cause can soon be granted pardon; this kind of excuse can earn sympathy. Thus, thus, did the Lord at one time grant pardon to Castus and Aemilius. While they were conquered in their first encounter, he made them the conquerors in their second battle, so that they might prove stronger than the fires, where earlier on they yielded to the fires, and that they might overcome by the very means which they had been overcome by.

See section 4 below. Their feast day was celebrated on 22 May.

2. See Lk 16:16; Mt 11:12.

3. The robber *se differebat*, while the Lord *latroni quod desperaverat offerebat*.

4. See Lk 23:39.

5. Augustine probably did not know the variant reading in the so-called Western text—and would almost certainly have rejected it if he had, like all the editors of the Greek New Testament. To my mind, if it was not what Luke wrote, it is what he should have written. It runs: "But Jesus answered and said to the one reviling him, Courage; today you shall be with me in paradise." So he didn't condemn either of them to hell on the cross, and the good thief's faith was sufficient to save his companion as well.

6. See Lk 22:54-62.

7. The reference is presumably to Jn 13:31-35, and/or Lk 22:31-32; but in either case Augustine's recollection of the text has been colored by Jn 21:15-17.

8. See Heb 12:6; Prv 3:12.

9. See Jn 21:15-17.

10. Here there is an oblique attack on the Donatists, whose bishops, according to Augustine, kept on referring to their people as "*our sheep, our flock*." It is to them that he will apply, in section 6, the text from the Song of Songs. See Sermons 138, 6-10; 146, 2; 147A 2-3.

11. See 1 Jn 2:1.

12. It is the second half of the verse, which he forgets to quote (or perhaps a stenographer or copyist forgot to write it down), that is essential to the point he is making.

13. See Sermon 146, 2.

14. See Gn 3:23-24. What a nerve Augustine sometimes had, in denying that a scriptural text said and meant precisely what it does say and mean! He seems to have a picture of paradise as situated above the earth, so that Adam and Eve, as well as falling into sin, also fell out of paradise to this earth.

15. *Putredinem tuam*; I treat this as an ironical honorific, on the model of *sanctitas tua*, or *caritas vestra*.

16. He is referring to the Donatists. They had failed to recognize themselves as being members of the Catholic Church, and so had broken with it.

17. He means the sacraments, in particular baptism.

18. See Ez 16.

19. See Sg 1:5; Ps 51:7.

20. Referring to the Donatist claim to have martyrs, who died for the cause of Donatism.

## SERMON 286

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYRS PROTASE AND GERVASE

Date: 428<sup>1</sup>

*Martyrs are witnesses, who are prepared to testify to Christ even to the death*

1. Martyrs—the word is Greek, but is now in common use in English<sup>2</sup>—are called “witnesses” in English. So there are true martyrs and false ones, because there are true, and false, witnesses. But scripture says, *the false witness shall not go unpunished* (Prv 19:5.9). If the false witness will not escape punishment, neither will the true witness be denied a crown. And it was, indeed, easy to bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ and the truth, because he is God; but to do so to the death, that was a great work.

There were some leaders of the Jews, mentioned by the gospel, who had believed in the Lord Jesus; but because of the Jews, it says, they did not dare confess him publicly. And straightaway a note is added to the chapter; the evangelist, you see, goes on to say, *For they loved glory with men more than with God* (Jn 12:42-43). So there were some people who would be ashamed to confess Christ before men;<sup>3</sup> while there were others, already better, who would not be ashamed to confess Christ before men, but who could not confess him to the death. These things, you see, are in the gift of God; and sometimes they are nursed in the soul step by step.

First of all pay attention to a comparison of these three with each other; one who believes in Christ, and is so timid he can scarcely whisper the name of Christ; another who believes in Christ, and publicly confesses Christ; a third who confesses Christ, and is prepared in his confession to die for Christ. The first of these is so weak, that what defeats him is shame, not fear; the second already puts on a brave front, but not yet to the shedding of his blood; the third has everything, so that there is nothing left to be desired. He fulfills, you see, what is written: *Contend for truth's sake even to the death* (Sir 4:28).

*The comparison illustrated in the case of Peter*

2. What can we say about Peter? He preached Christ, he was sent, he proclaimed the gospel already before the Lord's passion. We know, after all,

that the apostles were sent out to preach the gospel;<sup>4</sup> Peter, then, was sent, and he preached. How much had he overcome those Jews, the man who was later on afraid to confess Christ publicly? But still, he wasn't yet the equal of Protase and Gervase. He was already an apostle, he was the first, he was very close to the Lord; he was told, *You are Peter* (Mt 16:18). But he still wasn't Protase and Gervase, still wasn't Stephen, still wasn't the boy Nemesianus;<sup>5</sup> Peter still wasn't in that class. He wasn't yet what a number of women have been, what Agnes, what Crispina have been;<sup>6</sup> Peter still wasn't in the class of these women, with all the weakness of their sex.

I will certainly praise Peter; but first I must blush for Peter. How ready his spirit! But without the slightest idea of how to take its own measure. Because of course, if it hadn't been ready, he wouldn't have said to the Savior, "I will die for you": *Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you* (Mt 26:35). But the doctor, who knew how to take his pulse, foretold the dangerous climax of the fever. *You*, he says, *are laying down your life for me? Recognize the correct order; I must first lay down mine. You are laying down your life for me? Amen I tell you, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times* (Jn 13:38). The doctor foretold what the sick man didn't know. In this way the sick man discovered that his self-assurance had been totally misplaced, when he was questioned, *You are one of them, aren't you?* (Mk 14:67). The maid who questioned him was the fever. Look, the fever has reached its climax,<sup>7</sup> it has taken hold. What am I to say? Look, Peter is in grave danger, look, Peter is dying.

What else is dying, after all, but denying life? He denied Christ, he denied life, he died. But the one who raises the dead, *the Lord, looked round at him, and he wept bitterly* (Lk 22:61-62). By denying he perished, by weeping he rose again. And the Lord died first for him, as was fitting; and later on Peter died for the Lord, as right order required; and the martyrs followed. The previously thorny track was paved, and worn smooth by the feet of the apostles, made easier for those who were going to follow.

*The martyrs proclaimed Christ more effectively  
when dead than when alive*

3. The earth has been filled with the blood of the martyrs<sup>8</sup> as with seed, and from that seed have sprung the crops of the Church. They have asserted Christ's cause more effectively when dead than when they were alive. They assert it today, they preach him today; their tongues are silent, their deeds echo round the world. They were arrested, bound, imprisoned, brought to trial, tortured, burnt at the stake, stoned to death, run through, fed to wild beasts. In all their kinds of death they were jeered at as worthless; but *precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints* (Ps 116:15).

Precious then in the Lord's sight only, now in our sight too. Then, you see, when being a Christian was a disgrace, the death of the saints was worthless in the sight of men. They were execrated, held to be an abomination, held up as

accused: "May you die like that, be crucified like that, be burnt to death like that." Now, though, is there any of the faithful who would not welcome such curses?

*The discovery of the remains of Protase and Gervase in Milan in 387*

4. So today, brothers and sisters, we are celebrating the memorial set up in this place in honor of Saints Protase and Gervase, the martyrs of Milan. Not the day when it was set up here, but the day we are celebrating today is the day of the discovery of the death of his saints, precious in the sight of the Lord, by bishop Ambrose, that man of God. Of that glorious occasion for the martyrs I was myself also a witness. I was in Milan, I know about the miracles that occurred, when God bore witness to the precious deaths of his saints, so that by means of those miracles that death might be precious not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.<sup>9</sup>

A blind man, well known to the whole city, had his sight restored; he ran, he had himself led to the spot, he went home without a guide. I haven't heard that he died; perhaps he's still alive. He vowed that he was going to serve all the rest of his life in that basilica of theirs, where their bodies are. We all rejoiced at his being able to see, we left him there at his service.

*God does not restore everyone to health through the martyrs, but to all who imitate the martyrs, he does promise immortality*

5. God never stops bearing witness; and he knows the right way to bring his miracles to our notice. He knows how to act, so that they may be famous; he knows how to act, so that they don't become commonplace. He doesn't grant health to everyone through the martyrs; but to all who imitate the martyrs, he does promise immortality. What he doesn't give to everyone should not be sought by anyone he doesn't give it to; and those he doesn't give it to must take care not to grumble against him, so that he may give them what he does promise at the end. After all, even those people too who are now cured, die sooner or later; those who rise again at the end will live with Christ for ever.

The head has preceded us; he is waiting for the members to follow; then the whole body, Christ and the Church, will be complete. May he count us as inscribed there; and may he give us in this life what is best for us. He, you see, is the one who knows what is best for his children. *So if you, he says, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him? (Mt 7:11).* What good things? Not temporal ones, surely? He does give those too; but he also gives them to unbelievers. He does give those too; but he gives them also to the godless. We should be looking for the good things which we don't share with evil persons.

That Father knows how to give these good things to his children. Now a child of his asks for health of body; and he doesn't give it, he continues to chastise.

But is the Father,<sup>10</sup> when he chastises, not providing anything? He brandishes the rod, but just think what an inheritance he is getting ready. *He chastises, it says, every son whom he receives. For whom the Lord loves, he disciplines* (Heb 12:6). The reason I'm saying all this, my dear brothers and sisters, is that you shouldn't be disheartened when you ask and don't receive, and conclude that God hasn't got you in mind, if at the moment he doesn't pay attention to your wishes. The doctor, after all, doesn't always pay attention to the patient's wishes, although he is undoubtedly attending to his health and aiming at it. He doesn't give what the patient asks for; but he is attending to what he doesn't ask for. He asks for ice cream,<sup>11</sup> he doesn't give it. Has he turned out cruel, the one who came to cure? It's his skill, not his cruelty. He doesn't give on the spot what gives the patient pleasure; some things are denied him while he's not yet well, so that when he does get well he may be able to take anything.

*Comparison between the three boys in the fiery furnace,  
and the seven Maccabee brothers*

6. Think a bit about God's promises. What about these very martyrs? Do you suppose he gave them everything they requested? No. Many of them hoped they would be let off, and let off with some miracle, as the three boys<sup>12</sup> were let out of the fiery furnace. What were the words of king Nebuchadnezzar? *Since they hoped in him*, he said, *and changed the word of the king* (Dn 3:28). What a testimonial, from the man who was trying to kill them! He wanted them burnt to death, and later came to believe through them. If they had died in the fire, they would have received the crown of martyrdom in secret, and it would have been no good to this king. That's why they were preserved for a time, so that the unbeliever might come to believe, the one who had condemned them might come to praise God.

The God of the three boys was the same as the God of the Maccabees. He delivered the first ones from the fire, he had the latter die in the fire.<sup>13</sup> Did he chop and change? Did he love those more than these? A more splendid crown was given to the Maccabees. True, the others escaped the fire; but they were preserved for the perils of this world; these finished with all such perils in the fire. There remained no other trial or temptation, but only a victors' coronation. So the Maccabees received more.

Shake up your faith, bring the eyes of your hearts to bear, not your human eyes. You have other ones inside, after all, which God made for you. He opened the eyes of your hearts, when he gave you faith. Question those eyes: who got more, the Maccabees, or the three boys? I'm questioning your faith; if I were to question people who love this world—"I would rather be with the three boys" is what the weak soul says to me. Blush for shame in the presence of the mother of the Maccabees, who wanted her sons to die before herself, because she knew they weren't dying.<sup>14</sup>

*The martyrdom of the sickbed*

7. I on occasion am reminded of the leaflets on the miracles of the martyrs, which are read in your presence. A few days ago a leaflet was read, in which a sick woman, wracked with the severest pains said, "I can't bear it." The martyr, to whom she had come to be healed,<sup>15</sup> said, "What if you were enduring martyrdom?" So it is that many people endure martyrdom on their sickbeds, very many indeed. Satan has a certain method of persecution, more hidden and cunning than the ones he employed in those times. A believer is lying in bed, wracked with pain; he prays, he isn't listened to; or rather, he is listened to, but he is being tested, being put through his paces, being chastised in order to be received as a son.

So while he's being wracked with pain, along comes trial and temptation by tongue; either some female, or a man, if man he can be called, approaches the sickbed, and says to the sick man, "Tie on that *muti*,<sup>16</sup> and you will get better; let them apply that charm, and you will get better. So-and-so, and So-and-so and So-and-so; ask, they all got better by using it." He doesn't yield, he doesn't agree, he doesn't give his consent; he has to struggle, all the same. He has no strength, and he conquers the devil. He becomes a martyr on his sickbed, and he is crowned by the one who hung for him on the tree.

## NOTES

1. Perler and Lambot actually argue, more vaguely, for a date between 426 and 430. Others say about 425; in any case, on 19 June. One manuscript gives *Argentarium* as the place—a place otherwise entirely unknown. Perler argues persuasively for a place very near Hippo Regius, where a shrine, a *memoria* had been dedicated to the two Milanese martyrs. The name clearly has something to do with silver, or money. It can mean a bank. I suggest it should be translated "at the Mint." Not that there would have been a mint there at this time; but there very probably had been one when Hippo really had been Regius, or Royal—a mint for the Numidian kings. And the name could have stuck as the name of a suburb of the city. About Protase and Gervase, see section 4 below, note 9.

2. Latin, of course, in the text.

3. See Mk 8:38; Mt 10:32-33.

4. See Mt 10:5-42; Lk 9:2-10.

5. An otherwise unknown boy martyr. But an entry in the Carthaginian calendar for 22 December runs, "the feast of Saint Nemesianus," and he is probably the one Augustine is referring to here.

6. Saint Agnes was the famous girl martyr of Rome, martyred at the age of 12 or 13, celebrated in sermons by Ambrose and all subsequent Latin Fathers. There is uncertainty about which persecution she suffered in, whether in the middle of the third century, or the beginning of the fourth. Her feast is kept on 21 January, and the accounts of her martyrdom are all held to be entirely legendary.

Saint Crispina was a married woman of high rank and a mother, martyred on 5 December 304 at Theveste in Africa, and the account of her martyrdom is generally considered to be authentic. It contains an account of her interrogation by the judge, the proconsul Anulinus. When he lost patience with her "obstinacy," he first ordered her head to be shaved, to shame her in front of the crowd. If he hoped that would induce her to do what was required and offer incense to the statues of the

emperors, he cannot have been much of a student of psychology; it would surely only make her all the more eager to die. Then he sentenced her to be beheaded.

7. The Latin medical term for the climax of a fever is *accessio*. The verb, used here, is *accedo*. But this also means to approach, to come up. So the maid came up to Peter and stuck to him (she repeated her charge, with the same result, a second time). Augustine, seeing her as the symbol of the fever, says, literally, "Look, the fever has come up to him; look, it is sticking to him."

8. Again an apparent misplacement of the genitive. The text reads, *sanguinis impleta est martyribus*, has been filled with the martyrs of blood. Admittedly, *sanguinis* could be construed with "seed": the earth has been filled with martyrs, as with the seed of blood. But that reads just as strangely.

9. The only thing known about these Milanese martyrs is the discovery of their bodies by Saint Ambrose on 17 June 386, which Augustine talks about here. It happened after his conversion, but several months before his baptism. Ambrose describes the discovery in a letter to his sister Marcelina (Letter 22: PL 16, 1019-1026). He wished to dedicate a new basilica, and the people said that it must have proper relics to sanctify it. So they went to the church of Saints Felix and Nabor (which I presume had been built in a Christian cemetery), and there they started digging in front of the chancel, in a place where Ambrose says he had found "appropriate signs." He doesn't say what these were. They soon found what he calls an *urna*, which usually means an urn for the ashes of the dead. But here it must mean a sarcophagus, or something like that, because in it they found the bones of two very tall men, who had been beheaded—and also, he says, much blood. If they found *bones*, this can hardly indicate that the bodies were incorrupt (section 2). Then some old men declared that they had once heard the names of these martyrs, and had read the *titulus*, the inscription on the tomb, I imagine (section 12). So that is how they knew that these giants had been Protase and Gervase. Then he tells of the cure of the blind man; his name was Severus, and he was a butcher, *publicis mancipatus obsequis*—I think this must mean he was a municipal slave, working in the municipal slaughter house. He was healed just by touching the fringe of the pall covering the relics, as they were being transferred to Ambrose's new basilica.

The discovery certainly proved to be a trump card in Ambrose's hand in his running battle with the Arian Empress' mother, Justina, over possession of important churches in the city. See also Augustine's *Confessions* IX, 7.

10. One could also translate "a father," making it a general statement.

11. Just *frigidam* in the Latin, with *aquam* presumably to be supplied. But a little license is permissible here, I think.

12. "Boys" in the colonial English sense of servants. The Vulgate Latin at Dn 3:95 (3:28 in RSV) calls them God's *servos*—quite correct as a translation of the Greek *paidas*. But in older translations this was rendered *pueros*. And so Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have come down in liturgical and pious tradition as "the three holy children." Augustine has *pueri* here, and probably understood it correctly as servants of God.

13. See 2 Macc 7.

14. See 2 Macc 7:29.

15. Reading *cui sanari venerat*, instead of the text's *qui sanare venerat*, who had come to heal her. But did martyrs go around to the sick, or did the sick not rather go around to the martyrs at their shrines? Augustine himself introduced this custom of publicizing the miracles performed at the shrines of Saint Stephen, especially the one he had himself dedicated in Hippo Regius. See *The City of God* XXII, 6. I suppose it could be said that Saint Stephen had come to Africa to heal, when his relics were brought there. Even so, I consider my emendation to be not merely reasonable, but almost imperative.

16. The universal Southern African word for magic charms, spells, and potions of all sorts; often translated "medicine," but as in the expression "medicine man."



## SERMON 287

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Date: 428<sup>1</sup>

*The Church only celebrates two birthdays,  
those of Jesus Christ and John the Baptist*

1. It was a long drawn out story,<sup>2</sup> but the hard work of listening is compensated for by the sweetness of the truth. When the holy gospel was read, we heard about the illustrious birth of the most blessed John, the herald and forerunner of Christ. From this your graces should observe how really great a man he was, whose birth was so brought about. The Church has never celebrated the birthday in the flesh of any of the prophets, any of the patriarchs, any of the apostles. It only celebrates two birthdays, this man's and Christ's.

The very times at which they were both born prefigure a great mystery.<sup>3</sup> John was a great man, but just a man. So great a man was he, however, that whatever was greater than him was God. *The one who comes after me is greater than I* (Mt 3:11). That's what John said: *He is greater than I*. If he's greater than you, what's this that we have heard the one who is greater than you saying: *Among those born of women nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11)? If no human being is greater than you, what is the one who is greater than you? Do you want to hear who he is? *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (Jn 1:1).

*The Word was born, but born in the flesh, not in himself*

2. And how is it that God, the Word of God, *through which all things were made* (Jn 1:3), which was born without any beginning in time, through which time was made, how is it that he found a birthday in time? How, I repeat, could the Word through which time was made, find a day to be born on in time? You want to know how? Listen to the gospel itself: *The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us* (Jn 1:14). The birth of Christ is the birth of the flesh, not of the Word; but yes, it is the birth of the Word, because *the Word became flesh*. The Word was born, but born in the flesh, not in himself. In himself indeed, he is born of the Father, but he doesn't have a birthday in time.

*Comparison of the two births*

3. John was born, Christ too was born; John's birth was announced by the angel, Christ's was announced by the angel. Each birth a great miracle. The servant forerunner is borne by a barren woman to an old man; the Lord and householder is borne by a virgin without a man. John was a great man; but Christ was more than a man, because both man and God. A great man; but a man to be humbled, so that God might be exalted. Well, that the man was to be humbled, listen to the man himself: *I am not worthy to undo the strap of his sandal* (Mk 1:7). If he had said he was worthy, what a self-humiliation that would have been! But he said he wasn't even worthy of that. He prostrated himself completely, and prostrated himself under the rock. He was a lamp, you see,<sup>4</sup> and he was afraid of being blown out by the wind of pride.

*Comparing the days on which John and Christ were born, and the ways in which they met their deaths*

4. Finally, that every human being is to be humbled before Christ, and thus John also; and that Christ, the God-man, was to be exalted, was demonstrated both by their birthdays and by the ways in which they suffered. John was born today;<sup>5</sup> from today on the days diminish. Christ was born on 25 December;<sup>6</sup> from that day the days grow longer. John in his passion was diminished by losing his head; Christ was exalted on the cross.

How right, how true, how holy was the message brought to the virgin Mary!<sup>7</sup> *How shall this come about, since I do not know a man?* She believed, but she was asking about the manner of it.<sup>8</sup> And what did she hear? *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High, the Holy Spirit himself, that is, the power of the Most High will overshadow you. And therefore that holy child that will be born of you shall be called the Son of God* (Lk 1:34-35). *The power of the Most High shall overshadow you.* You will conceive, but there will be no lustful desire. There will be no heat, where the Holy Spirit offers shade. But because there is now plenty of heat for our bodies, that must be enough for your graces; think about it well and it will grow more.

## NOTES

1. Fischer, Kunzelmann, Lambot, and Perler all agree in suggesting a date between 425 and 430, the actual day, then as now, being 24 June. For some reason this is mentioned in the sermon's title, where it strikes me as superfluous, so I omit it. It was apparently preached in Hippo Regius just a few days after Sermon 286 on Saints Protase and Gervase.

2. Presumably the whole of Lk 1, beginning with the angel's annunciation to Zachary, and ending with John's birth and Zachary's hymn of thanksgiving, thus including the annunciation to Mary and her Magnificat.

3. He will tell us what this is in section 4.
4. See Jn 5:35.
5. 24 June, officially, and perhaps really so then, midsummer, the summer solstice.
6. He actually said "on the eighth of the Kalends of January."
7. This final piece does seem to have nothing to do with John the Baptist's birthday, and may at first suggest the wanderings of an old man's thoughts. But if, as suggested in note 2, the whole of Lk 1 had been read, it could simply be Augustine's going on to the next section of the gospel to be explained, and then very soon giving up because of the heat.
8. This to distinguish Mary's question from Zachary's, which was treated by the angel Gabriel as an indication of unbelief, Lk 1:1-20.

## SERMON 288

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (ON THE VOICE AND THE WORD)

Date: 401<sup>1</sup>

#### *The special role of John the Baptist*

1. Today's feast reminds us, as it comes round every year, that the Lord's forerunner was born in a wonderful way before the Wonderful One.<sup>2</sup> Today especially it is fitting for us to reflect on and to praise his birth. The reason, after all, why this anniversary is dedicated to this miracle, is to insure that forgetfulness does not erase from our hearts the benefits of God and the mighty works of the Most High. So John, the Lord's herald, was sent before him but made through him; because *all things were made through him, and without him was made nothing* (Jn 1:3). A man sent before the man God, recognizing his Lord, announcing his creator; having already discerned his presence on earth in his mind,<sup>3</sup> he pointed him out with his finger. His, after all, are the words, as he pointed out the Lord, and bore witness to him: *Behold the Lamb of God; behold the one who takes away the sin of the world* (Jn 1:29).

Rightly then did a barren woman give birth to the herald, a virgin to the judge. In John's mother barrenness was made fertile; in the mother of Christ fertility did not destroy virginity. If your patience, and quiet eagerness, and attentive silence provide me with the chance to say, with the Lord's help, what he grants me to say; then your attention will undoubtedly profit you, and I shall be well paid for the pains I take in suggesting to your ears and minds something of the great mystery involved.

#### *John, the bridegroom's friend, a model of humility*

2. There were prophets before John, and many of them, and great ones, worthy of God, full of God, who foretold the Savior and bore witness to the Truth. Yet for all that, of none of them could it be said, as was said of John, *Among those born of women, none has arisen greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11). So what's the meaning of such greatness, sent before the Great One? It is a testimonial to extraordinary humility. After all, he was so great, that people

could think he was the Christ. John could have taken advantage of people's mistake, and he wouldn't have had to work hard to persuade them he was the Christ, because those who heard and saw him had already thought this without his saying it. There was no need for him to sow the seeds of the error; all he would have to do would be to confirm it.

He, however, is the bridegroom's friend, jealous for the bridegroom; and he doesn't put himself forward as an adulterer in the bridegroom's place, but bears witness to his friend, and commends the one who really was the bridegroom to the bride. He wants to be loved in him, hates the idea of being loved instead of him. *The one who has the bride, he says, is the bridegroom.* And as though you were to say, "What about you?"—*But the friend, he says, of the bridegroom stands, and hears him, and joyfully rejoices because of the bridegroom's voice* (Jn 3:29). Stands and hears; the disciple hears the master; because he hears, he stands; because if he doesn't hear, he falls. It's here that John's greatness is supremely brought to our notice; that when he could be thought to be the Christ, he preferred to bear witness to the Christ, to bring him to our notice; to humble himself rather than to be taken for him, and taken in by himself.

Rightly was he called *more than a prophet* (Lk 7:26). About the prophets, you see, who lived before the coming of the Lord, the Lord himself speaks as follows: *Many prophets and just men have wished to see what you see, and have not seen it* (Mt 13:17). Yes indeed, those who were filled with the Spirit of God to proclaim that the Christ was going to come, longed, if it could possibly happen, to see him present on earth. That's why that man Simeon's departure from the world was put off, so that he might see him born through whom the world was established.<sup>4</sup> And he did indeed see the Word of God in the flesh as an infant. But he wasn't yet teaching, hadn't yet taken on the role of master, though with the Father he was already the master of the angels. So Simeon saw him, but as an infant. John, however, saw him already preaching, already choosing disciples.

Where? At the river Jordan. That, you see, is where Christ's work of teaching began.<sup>5</sup> It was there that the baptism of Christ that was to come<sup>6</sup> was commended to us, because the previous kind of baptism was received there, and the one preparing the way, and saying, *Prepare a way for the Lord, make straight his paths* (Mk 1:3). The Lord, you see, wished to be baptized by the servant, so that those who are baptized by the Lord might appreciate what it is they receive.<sup>7</sup> So he began from the very place where prophecy had very properly preceded him: *He will have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the limits of the whole wide world* (Ps 72:8). At the very river where Christ began to have dominion,<sup>8</sup> John saw Christ, recognized him, bore witness to him.

He humbled himself before the great one, so that being humble he might be exalted by the great one. And he called himself *the friend of the bridegroom* (Jn 3:29); and what sort of friend? His equal, perhaps? Perish the thought! Far, far, below him. How far? *I am not worthy, he said, to undo the strap of his sandal* (Mk 1:7). This prophet, or rather this one more than a prophet, was found worthy to be foretold by a prophet. It was of him, after all, that Isaiah said what has been

read to us today: *The voice of one crying in the desert: Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled in, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places smooth ways; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Cry out! What shall I cry out? All flesh is grass, and all its glory as the flowers in the grass; the grass has withered, the flowers have drooped; but the Word of the Lord abides for ever (Is 40:3-8).*

Would your graces please pay close attention. John was asked who he was, whether he was the Christ, whether Elijah, whether the prophet:<sup>9</sup> *I am not, he said, the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet. And they said, So who are you? I am a voice crying in the desert (Jn 1:22-23).* He called himself a voice. You have John as a voice; what have you got Christ as, if not as a word? The voice is sent on ahead, so that the Word later on may be understood. And what sort of Word? Listen to him showing you that very clearly: *In the beginning, he says, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; this was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing (Jn 1:1-3).* If all things, John as well. Why be surprised if the Word made himself a voice? See, just see, whether at the river you have both voice and Word; the voice John, the Word Christ.

*The difference between voice and word*

3. Let's inquire what the difference is between a voice and a word; let's inquire attentively, it's no small matter, and it calls for no small measure of attention. The Lord will grant that I don't grow tired explaining, nor you listening. Here we have two things, a voice and a word. What's a voice? What's a word? What are they? Listen to what you can confirm in yourselves, and what you can give yourselves as the answer to the question you ask yourselves. A word; if it hasn't got a significant meaning, it isn't called a word. A voice, on the other hand, even if it's just a sound, and makes a meaningless noise, like the sound of someone yelling, can be called a voice, can't be called a word. Someone or other has groaned; it's a voice. They've wailed; it's a voice. It's a kind of formless sound, bearing or carrying a noise to the ears, without any meaning to the intelligence.<sup>10</sup> A word, however, unless it signifies something, unless it carries something to the ears and something else further in to the mind, is not called a word. So as I was saying, if you yell, it's a voice; if you say "Man" it's a word; if you say "Beast," or "God," or "World," or anything else. These, you see, are all significant voices that I uttered, not empty ones, not ones making a sound and saying nothing.

So if you've now got the distinction between voice and word, listen to what ought to astonish you in these two, John and Christ. A word has full value, even without a voice; a voice is worthless without a word. Let me balance the account, and explain, if I can, this proposition. Here you are, you've been wanting to say something; this very thing you want to say has already been conceived in the heart, it's being held by the memory, got ready by the will, kept alive in the

intelligence. And this very thing you want to say is not yet in any language. The thing itself that you want to say, that has been conceived in the heart, is not in any language, neither French, nor English, nor Welsh,<sup>11</sup> nor Hebrew, nor the language of any nation. The thing has simply been conceived in the heart, ready to come out.

So, as I said, it's some point, some opinion, an idea conceived in the heart, ready to come out, to be put to a listener. Thus, insofar as it's known to the person in whose heart it is, it's a word, already known to the one who's going to say it, not yet to the one who's going to hear it. So there you have a word, already formed, already complete, abiding in the heart; it seeks to come out, in order to be uttered to the hearer. The one who has conceived the word to be spoken, and has it in his heart, known to himself, considers the person he is going to say it to. Let me speak in the name of Christ to ears well taught in the Church, and I will make so bold as to suggest something that is already rather more profound to those who are not entirely uneducated. So would your graces please pay close attention?

Observe the word conceived in the heart, it's seeking to come out, in order to be spoken. It considers the person to whom it is to be spoken. Does it discover he's French? It looks for a French voice with which to present itself to a Frenchman. Does it discover he's English? It looks for an English voice with which to present itself to an Englishman. Does it discover he's Welsh? It looks for a Welsh voice with which to present itself to a Welshman. Set aside the diversity of listeners, and that word that has been conceived in the heart is neither French, nor English, nor Welsh, nor in any language.<sup>12</sup> It looks for the sort of voice to come out with that will help the listener.

Now, brothers and sisters, to give you a definite proposition, so that you can understand: I have conceived in my heart, so as to say, "God." This thing I have conceived in my heart is something great; I mean, a single syllable isn't what God is;<sup>13</sup> I mean this short voice isn't God. I want to say "God," I consider the person I am to say it to. Is he English? I say "God." Is he French? I say, "Dieu." To someone English I say "God," to someone French I say "Dieu." Between "God" and "Dieu" there's a difference of sound; there's one set of letters here, another there. But in my heart, in the thing I want to say, in the thing I'm thinking about, there is no diversity of letters, no variously sounding syllables; it is what it is. In order to express it to an Englishman, one voice is used, for a Frenchman another. If I wanted to express it to a Welshman, I would make use of another;<sup>14</sup> if to a Hebrew, another; if to an Egyptian another; if to an Indian another. How many voices the word of the heart would make, with the change of persons,<sup>15</sup> without any change or variation in itself! It reaches an Englishman with an English voice, a Frenchman with a French one, a Hebrew with a Hebrew one.

It reaches the hearer, it doesn't depart from the speaker. Do I myself, I mean, lose what I produce in another person by speaking? That sound employed as a means has given rise to something in you, it hasn't removed it from me. Just now I was thinking about God; you hadn't yet heard my voice; once you heard it, you too began to have what I was thinking about, but I didn't lose what I had.

So in me, as though on the threshold of my heart, as though in the cabinet room of my mind, the word preceded my voice. No voice has yet sounded in my mouth, and the word is already in my heart. But in order that what I have conceived in my heart may come out to you, it requires<sup>16</sup> the service of the voice.

*How Christ the Word preceded John the voice*

4. If I am able, with the help of your attention and your prayers, to say what I wish to, I think that those who understand will be delighted; but those who don't understand must please pardon this man as he struggles, and plead with God to show mercy. Indeed, what I'm saying comes from there too.<sup>17</sup> What I am to say is in my heart; but providing the service of the voices needed to bring it to your ears is hard work. So what's the situation, brothers and sisters? What's the situation? You have certainly paid close attention, you certainly understand now that the word was in my heart, before it provided itself with a voice in which to reach your ears. I think everyone understands that, because what happens with me happens with everyone who talks. Here I am, already knowing what I wish to say, I'm keeping it in my heart, I'm seeking the service of the voice; before the voice sounds in my mouth, the word is already being held in my heart. So the word has preceded my voice, and in me is first the word, afterward the voice; to you, however, for you to understand, first comes the voice to your ear, so that the word may be introduced into your heart. After all, you would be unable to understand what was in me before it found a voice, unless it were in you after you heard the voice.

So if John is a voice, Christ a word, Christ comes before John, but with God; Christ comes after John, but with us. It's a great mystery, brothers and sisters. Pay close attention, open your minds to the greatness of the matter again and again. You see, your grasp of it delights me, and makes me much bolder in my approach to you, with the help of the one whom I am preaching, such a little one preaching such a great one, any sort of man preaching the Word who is God. So with his help I am becoming much bolder in my approach to you, and after first outlining this idea of the distinction between voice and word, I am going on to suggest what follows from it.

John was cast in the role of the voice, but symbolically, in a mystery; because he wasn't the only one to be the voice. Everybody, you see, who proclaims the Word is the voice of the Word. What the sound from our mouths is, you see, to the word we carry in our hearts, that every devout soul that proclaims it, is to that Word, of which it is said, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; this was in the beginning with God* (Jn 1:1-2). How many words, or rather how many voices,<sup>18</sup> are produced by the word conceived in the heart! How many preachers were produced by the Word abiding with the Father! He sent the patriarchs, he sent the prophets, he sent so many and such great ones to proclaim him in advance. The Word abiding sent voices, and after many voices sent in advance, the one Word himself came as in his vehicle, in his voice, in his flesh.<sup>19</sup> So gather together all the voices which



preceded the Word as into one man, and lump them all together in the person of John. He was cast in the symbolic role of all of them, he alone was the sacred and mystical representative or person of them all. That's why he is properly called the voice, as the sign and sacrament of all voices.

*He must grow, I must diminish*

5. So now observe the significance of, *He must grow, while I must diminish* (Jn 3:30). Observe, if I am able to express it; may I be capable, if I may not say of suggesting, then at least of thinking in what way, on what principle, with what intention, for what reason, according to the distinction I have stated between voice and word, the voice itself said, John himself, *He must grow, while I must diminish*. Oh, what a great and wonderful sacrament! Notice the person of the voice, the person in which all the voices were represented, saying about the person of the Word, *He must grow, while I must diminish*. Why? Just think. The apostle says, *We know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when what is perfect comes, what is in part shall be laid aside* (1 Cor 13:9-10). What is perfect? *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (Jn 1:1). That's perfect. Let the apostle Paul also tell us: *Who, since he was in the form of God, did not think it robbery to be equal to God* (Phil 2:6). It is this one, equal to God the Father, this Word of God with God, through which all things were made, that we shall see as he is, but at the end.

Because now it's what the evangelist John says: *Beloved, we are children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. Beloved, we know that when he appears we shall be like him, since we shall see him as he is* (1 Jn 3:2). This is the vision promised us, it is for this vision that we are being trained, for this vision that we are purifying our hearts. *Blessed*, he says, after all, *are the pure in heart, since they shall see God* (Mt 5:8). He showed his flesh, showed it to his servants; but it was *the form of a servant* (Phil 2:7); like his own voice, among the many voices he had sent in advance, he also showed them his own flesh.

The Father was being asked for, as though the Son himself, who is equal to the Father, could already be seen as he is; he was talking to his servants, in the form of a servant.<sup>20</sup> *Lord*, Philip said to him, *show us the Father, and it is enough for us*. He was looking for the end of all his aims, the goal of the progress he was making, which, when he reached it, would leave nothing further to be required. *Show us*, he says, *the Father, and it is enough for us*. Good, Philip, good; you understand perfectly that the Father is enough for you. What's the meaning of *is enough*? You will look for nothing further; he will fill you, satisfy you, perfect you. But see whether this one you are listening to might not also, perhaps, be enough for you. But hardly all on his own, since he never departs from the Father. So let him answer Philip, who wants to see: *Have I been with you all this time, and you do not know me? Philip, whoever has seen me, has also seen the Father* (Jn 14:8-9). What can be the meaning of *Philip, whoever has seen me has also seen the Father*, but, "Haven't you seen me? Is that why you are asking for the Father? *Philip, whoever has seen me, has also seen the*

*Father. You, though, can see me, and you don't see me. I mean, you don't see me as the one who made you; but you can see what I was made on your account." Whoever has seen me, he says, has also seen the Father. How, if not because in the form of God he did not think it robbery to be equal to God? So what was Philip seeing? That he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, made into the likeness of men, and being found in condition as a man (Phil 2:6-7). That's what Philip was seeing, the form of a servant, Philip who was going to be free to see the form of God.*

So John is the person, plays the role, of all voices. Christ is the person of the Word. All voices must necessarily diminish, when we are promoted to seeing Christ. The more, after all, you make progress toward seeing wisdom, the less need you have of a voice. A voice in the prophets, a voice in the apostles, a voice in the psalms, a voice in the gospel.<sup>21</sup> Let this come: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God (Jn 1:1)*; when we see him as he is (1 Jn 3:2), you don't suppose, do you, the gospel will be chanted then? You don't imagine, do you, we are going to hear the prophecies, going to read the letters of the apostles? Why not? Because the voices fall away, as the Word grows; because *he must grow, while I must diminish (Jn 3:30)*.

And the Word, indeed, neither grows in itself, nor falls away in itself. In us, however, it can be said to grow, when we grow by making progress in it; just as light grows in the eyes, when it is seen more fully as their sight improves, while it was seen less, of course, when their sight was failing. And there was less light in the sick eyes, there's more light in the healthy eyes; while in itself the light neither diminished earlier on, nor grew later. So the service provided by the voice diminishes, when the mind makes progress toward the Word. Thus it is necessary for Christ to grow, for John, on the other hand, to diminish. This is indicated by their respective deaths. John, you see, was diminished, when his head was cut off, while Christ was exalted, he grew, as it were, on the cross. It is also indicated by their respective birthdays, because from John's birthday<sup>22</sup> the days begin to be shortened, while from Christ's they are once again increased.

## NOTES

1. So Fischer, Kunzelmann and Perler. The sermon was preached in Carthage the day after Sermon 279 on the conversion of Saint Paul, and of the local man Faustinus. On the same day, in the afternoon, he also preached, it would seem, Sermon 293B.

2. See Is 9:6.

3. I think he is referring to John leaping in his mother's womb, when Mary came to visit Elizabeth, Lk 1:41.

4. See Lk 2:25-26.

5. His *magisterium*.

6. He means Christian baptism.

7. It was his main point against the Donatists that in Christian baptism it is not the minister, but Christ who baptizes—that is, who confers the grace of regeneration; and therefore the moral obliquity of the minister, if there be such, cannot affect the validity of the sacrament.

8. The river which the palmist had in mind was not, in fact, the Jordan, but the Euphrates, nearly always referred to in the Old Testament simply as “the River.”

9. The special prophet, as he had become in the popular messianic expectation, who is foretold in Dt 18:15. The New Testament does sometimes apply this text to John the Baptist, for example when Jesus calls him more than a prophet, Lk 7:26; see also Lk 1:76. The Johannine tradition, however, applies it to Christ, and denies it, as here, to John the Baptist.

10. Reading *intellectui* in the dative case, to match the *auribus* of the first half of the sentence, instead of the text’s genitive *intellectus*: without any intelligible meaning.

From now on I will often be obliged to use the word “voice” in ways in which we don’t really employ it in English; I think Augustine too was probably stretching the Latin *vox* beyond its ordinary limits.

11. He says, “neither Greek nor Latin nor Punic,” and I would normally have kept these names in the translation. But in due and leisurely course he is going to illustrate with the particular word *Deus*, *Theos*, in Latin and Greek respectively; and I, surely, must at least translate *Deus* by “God”; and “God” of course, is not a Latin word. As I am translating a sermon for the benefit of English speakers, I have to indulge in the fiction that the preacher was preaching in English—at least I usually have to. Very occasionally the fiction has to be on the other foot, and we make believe we are listening to the preacher in Latin.

Punic in North Africa rather had the status then that Welsh (and Gaelic) has in the British Isles now. French for the educated English speaker, even if, as Augustine equivalently was, he is a Welshman living in Wales, or a Scotsman living in Scotland, has something of the status that Greek had for Latin speakers then; and most educated English, Welsh, and Scots people are as little at ease with French as Augustine was with Greek.

12. Is he right here? I for my part am conscious of thinking in my own language; and it is because I am not very quick at thinking in other languages, that I am not very good at speaking them. I strongly suspect that Augustine very definitely thought—conceived words—in Latin. Even if one has concepts that are, if you like, beyond any language, they are bound at least to be infected, so to say, by the language you habitually think in.

13. He actually says “Two syllables aren’t what *Deus* is.”

14. His Welshman, I remind the reader, was a Punic speaker, one of his own countrymen, who were in a majority, at least in the rural areas. Why didn’t he give the Punic for “God,” as he had just given the Greek? I fear it was because he didn’t know what it was, just as 90% of English people who know that the French for God is *Dieu* haven’t the slightest idea what the Welsh for God is. I am relieved that Augustine did not enunciate God in Punic, because if he had, I would have had to find out how to enunciate him in Welsh.

15. *Personarum mutatione*; so the edited text. But the Maurists admit that the manuscripts—or some manuscripts; they are not very precise in their footnotes—read *per sonorum mutationes*; through changes of sound. He could have said either; the first is rather more original.

16. Treating *Inquirat* as if it could mean the same as *requirit*—or else emending it to that.

17. From where? From God, I suppose. But it does not seem to have much to do with what he is saying. The next sentence continues: *Inde unde loquor, inest corde quod dicam*. It seems over-loaded. I suggest the first three words should be excised, and have so translated.

18. Here he is admitting that he is using the word *voice* in a rather strained sense, as suggested in note 10 above.

19. Yes; but his flesh is *not* John the Baptist! Augustine’s preferred and mature application of the word/voice analogy is precisely to the mystery of the incarnation, to the Word taking, or becoming, flesh, in the same sort of way as the *verbum mentis*, the inner word of the mind, takes or becomes voice, or rather voiced word. This is a very early sermon; so he is still stuck with John as the voice, and drops this maturer idea as soon as he mentions it, though he does allude to it again a little later on.

20. The sentence could also be divided, and taken, as follows: The Father was being asked for,

as though he himself could already be seen as he is; the Son, who is equal to the Father, was talking to his servants in the form of a servant.

21. All sections of the holy scriptures; the apostles being the New Testament letters.

22. Conventionally the summer solstice, whereas Christmas represents the winter solstice.

## SERMON 289

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

*Date: before 410<sup>1</sup>*

*It is not easy to explain the profound reasons  
for the miraculous birth of John the Baptist*

1. The reason for our large and festive gathering today is to celebrate the birthday of John the Baptist, whose marvelous conception and birth we heard about when the gospel was read. It is a great and significant mystery, my brothers and sisters; John's mother was barren and an old woman, his father an old man; each of them without the slightest hope of having children. But because *nothing is impossible for God* (Lk 1:37), the promise of a son was made to a man who didn't believe it.<sup>2</sup> The father had his voice taken away because he lacked faith; it had already been written, after all, *I believed, therefore I spoke* (Ps 116:10). He didn't believe, and he didn't speak.

Meanwhile the virgin also conceived, and this was a sublime miracle and far and away more remarkable. A barren woman conceives the herald, a virgin the judge. John is born of man and woman, Christ of woman only. Can John perhaps be compared with Christ? Perish the thought! It was not for nothing, however, that such a great one came before such a great one. If, you see, the same Lord our God<sup>3</sup> is good enough to make my efforts effective, and I am able to explain what I think, then neither will I be abandoned in my worthlessness, nor will you be cheated of your expectations. But if I am not altogether able to explain what I think, then the Lord our God will supply in your hearts, what he has perhaps withdrawn from me because of my feebleness. The reason I've made this little preamble is that I know that you don't know what I wish to say; and I am already aware of how difficult it is to explain it. But this was worth bringing to your notice, so that by your very attentiveness you would be able to pray for me.

*The contrast between the fall and the redemption,  
Adam and Christ, Eve and Mary*

2. Elizabeth conceived a human being, and so did Mary, Elizabeth being the mother of John, Mary of Christ. But the one Elizabeth conceived was only a

man, the one Mary conceived was God and man. It's a marvelous thing, how a creature could conceive the creator. So what is to be understood by it, my brothers and sisters, but that it was the same one making flesh for himself from a mother alone, who had made the first human being without father and mother?<sup>4</sup> That first fall of ours occurred when the woman, through whom we have died, conceived the serpent's poison. The serpent, you see, gave her persuasive reasons for sinning, and his evil persuasion was accepted.<sup>5</sup> So if our first fall occurred when the woman conceived the serpent's poison in her heart, small wonder that our salvation was achieved when a woman conceived the flesh of the Almighty in her womb. Each sex had fallen, each was to be restored. It was through a woman that we were cast into destruction, through a woman that salvation was restored to us.

*John the Baptist deigned to be a supreme example of humility*

3. So what does John the Baptist mean? Why was he inserted into the story, why was he sent ahead? I will tell you, if I can. Our Lord Jesus Christ said about John, *Among those born of women, none has arisen greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11). If John is compared to men, all of them are surpassed by that man; the only one who beats him is the God-man. John was sent ahead of the Lord. So greatly did he excel, such was the grace evident in him, that he himself was thought to be the Christ. The Jews, you see, were expecting the Christ, because it was even in the very prophets, whom they too read, that the Christ was foretold. They expected him when he was absent, killed him when he was present; since they think he is not the one, they have fallen away, he has remained. They haven't all fallen away, however, because from among the Jews also many believed.

So because the Christ was expected, notice the particular glory of John; when such grace, you see, was observed in him, when he was baptizing for repentance,<sup>6</sup> and preparing a way for the Lord, like a surveyor sent ahead, the Jews sent to him and said, *Who are you? Are you Elijah, or the prophet? Or are you the Christ? I am not*, he says, *the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet. And you*, they say, *who are you? I am*, he says, *the voice of one crying in the desert*. John answered the Jews inquiring who he was, and already beginning to think that he might be the Christ: *I am the voice of one crying in the desert* (Jn 1:21-23). You heard, if you were paying attention, the reading from the prophet, which was chanted first. There it is written, *The voice of one crying in the desert, Prepare a way for the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled in, and every mountain and hill be humbled, and the tortuous ways shall become direct, and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh will see the salvation of God*. Then the Lord said through the prophet, *Cry out. And I said, What shall I cry out?* And the Lord answers there in the prophet, *All flesh is grass, and all the glory of the flesh like the flowers in the grass; the grass has withered, and the flowers fallen; but the Word of the Lord abides for ever* (Is 40:3-8).

John said, *I am the voice of one crying in the desert, Prepare a way for the*

*Lord*; that is to say, "It was foretold about me by the prophet that I would appear, crying in the desert." So it is John's business to say, *All flesh is grass, and all the glory of the flesh like the flowers in the grass; the grass has withered, and the flowers fallen; but the Word of the Lord abides for ever.* The Word is conceived in the virgin's womb; the voice in the desert is crying the Word. If a voice isn't a word, it may perhaps be a noise in the ears—because perhaps it may not even be possible to call it that. Every word is a voice, not every voice a word. If you open your mouth and shout as loud as you can, it's a voice, it's not a word. But what is a voice that can be called a word? Where something is understood, a voice that means something is a word. But look here, there's no sound yet, I want to say something, there's already a word in my heart. So yes, there can be a word without a voice, and there can be a voice without a word. Add voice to word, the word comes forth to be known.

So what was Christ for Mary? The hidden Word. A voice was sent in advance, to go ahead of the Word. What is John? *The voice of one crying in the desert.* What is Christ? *In the beginning was the Word* (Jn 1:1). What are you, voice? What are you, man? *All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man like the flowers in the grass; the grass has withered, and the flowers fallen; but the Word of the Lord abides for ever.* Hold fast to the Word; it was for your sake, after all, that the Word took on grass; Christ, the Word, became flesh. But *all flesh is grass, and all the honors of the flesh like the flowers in the grass*; let us make light of things present, set our hopes on things to come. *Every valley shall be filled in, all humility shall be exalted; and every mountain and hill shall be humbled*; all pride shall be cast down. Lower the mountains, fill up the valleys, and you get a level plain. From the flowers in the grass give me the wealthy and those loaded with honors; let them hear, *God withstands the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (Jas 4:6; 1 Pt 5:5; Prv 3:34). Give me the poor, the desperate, conscious of their feebleness; they mustn't despair, they must trust in the one who came for the sake of all. Let these be lifted up, those be pressed down. When he comes, let him find a level plain, not a stone on which to stub his toe.<sup>7</sup> That's why, after all, John was saying, "*Prepare a way for the Lord; not for me, but for the Lord; for the one I was sent by, not for what I am.*"

*John the lamp compared with Christ the light*

4. But the Jews say, *Are you the Christ?* (Jn 1:21). If he had not been a valley to be filled in, but a mountain to be humbled, he would have found here an opportunity for deception. They, you see, would like to hear from him what they believed. I mean they were so impressed by his grace, that they would undoubtedly believe whatever he said. There you are, he had found an opportunity of deceiving the human race; if he said "I am the Christ," they would believe him. If he started bragging with a name that belonged to another, he would lose his own proper merit. If he started bragging as though he were the Christ, wouldn't he have this answer to give himself? "Why are you pushing yourself forward? *All flesh is grass, and its glory like the flowers in the grass; the grass has*

withered, the flowers fallen. Understand what abides for ever; *but the Word of the Lord abides for ever*" (Is 40:8).

He recognized himself; how right the Lord was to call him a lamp. This is what the Lord said about John: *He was a burning and a shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to exult in his light* (Jn 5:35). What, though, does John the evangelist say about him? *There was a man sent by God, whose name was John; this man came for witness, to bear witness about the light; that man was not the light* (Jn 1:6-8). Who? John the Baptist. Who says this? John the evangelist. *That man was not the light*. You say *that man was not the light*, while the light itself says about him, *That man was a burning and a shining lamp?* "But I know," he says, "what sort of light I'm talking about; a light, I'm well aware, in comparison with which a lamp is not a light." Listen to what comes next: *That was the true light which enlightens every man coming into this world* (Jn 1:9). John does not enlighten every man, Christ does. And John recognized himself as a lamp, in order not to be blown out by the wind of pride. A lamp can both be lit and be put out. The Word of God cannot be put out, a lamp always can.

*John, the greatest of human beings, sent ahead so that Christ might be recognized as being more than a human being*

5. So the greatest of human beings was sent, in order to bear witness to the one who was more than a human being. When that one, you see, than whom none greater has arisen among those born of women, says, *I am not the Christ* (Jn 1:20), and humbles himself before the Christ, the Christ is to be understood as something more than a human being. I mean, if you look for the greatest of human beings in John, Christ is more than a human being. Take in the precursor in such a way that you look for the judge he precedes; listen to the herald in such a way that you fear the judge he represents. He was sent, he foretold the one who was coming. And what sort of witness did John bear to Christ? Listen to what sort: *The strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to undo* (Jn 1:27). Have you understood, you lump of humanity, what you should do? *Everyone who humbles himself shall be exalted* (Lk 14:11). What then did he say about Christ? *From his fullness have we all received* (Jn 1:16). What's *we all*? So the holy patriarchs and prophets and apostles, whether sent ahead before the incarnation, or sent by the incarnate one, *from his fullness have we all received*. We are the vessels, he is the fountain.

So if we have understood the mystery, my brothers and sisters, John is a man, Christ is God. Let the man be humbled, and God be exalted. That man might be humbled, John was born on the day on which the days begin to grow shorter. That God might be exalted, Christ was born on the day on which the days begin to grow longer. A great and significant sacrament indeed. That's why we celebrate John's birthday, like Christ's, because the very birth is full of mystery. What mystery? The mystery of our heights and depths.<sup>8</sup> Let us diminish in our being human, grow in God. Let us be humbled in ourselves, in order to be exalted



in him. The sacramental sign of this great matter was fulfilled in the way each of them suffered. That man might be diminished, John lost his head; that God might be exalted, Christ was hung up on the tree.

This is what John was sent for, that we might imitate him, and hold fast to the Word. However much human pride may brag, of whatever heights of sanctity, who will ever be what John was? Whoever you may be, thinking so highly of yourself, you will never be what John was. He wasn't yet born, and by leaping in the womb he was already heralding the Lord who would be born.<sup>9</sup> What could surpass such sanctity as that? Imitate him;<sup>10</sup> listen to what he says about Christ: *We from his fullness have received.* The lamp is showing you the fountain in the night, he also drinks from it himself. *For we,* he says, *from his fullness have all received.* We all; he is the fountain, we the vessels; he the day, we the lamps. How utterly feeble humanity is; we need a lamp to look for the daylight!

*The apostles as well as John the Baptist are lamps,  
and the cross is the lampstand*

6. But the apostles too, my brothers and sisters, are lamps for the day. Don't imagine that John alone is a lamp, and that the apostles aren't. The Lord said to them, *You are the light of the world* (Mt 5:14). And in case they should suppose they were light of the same sort as the light about which it is said, *That was the true light, which enlightens every man coming into this world* (Jn 1:9), he went on straightaway to teach them this true light. After saying *You are the light of the world*, he added, *Nobody lights a lamp, and puts it under the bushel.* In calling you light, I meant you are a lamp; don't jump about for joy in your pride, in case its little flame gets blown out. I'm not placing you under a bushel; but in order to shine, you shall be on the lampstand.

Listen to the lampstand; be lamps, and you shall have a lampstand. The cross of Christ is a great lampstand. Whoever wishes to shine, mustn't be ashamed of this wooden lampstand. Listen, so that you may understand that the lampstand is the cross of Christ. *Nobody lights a lamp and puts it under the bushel, but on the lampstand, so that it may shine on all who are in the house. So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify—not as you seek to be glorified, seek to be snuffed out—and glorify your Father who is in heaven* (Mt 5:14-16). Through your good works, may they glorify your Father. You were not able to light yourselves in order to be lamps, not able to put yourselves on the lampstand; let him be glorified, who did all this for you.

So listen to the apostle Paul, listen to the lamp exulting in the lampstand. *But for me*, he says [here those who know what comes next shout out];<sup>11</sup> *But for me—but what for you? God forbid I should glory in anything but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* I glory in the lampstand; if the lampstand removes itself, I fall. *God forbid I should glory in anything but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* (Gal 6:14). You've all cheered, you've applauded. Let the world be

crucified to you, crucify yourselves to the world. What does that mean? Don't look to the world for happiness; hold yourselves back from the happiness of the world. The world coaxes you, beware of its corruption; the world threatens you, don't be afraid of its assaults. If the good things of the world don't corrupt you, if the bad things of the world don't corrupt you, the world has been crucified to you, you have been crucified to the world.

Glory in the lampstand. Always, lamp, preserve humility in the lampstand, so that you may keep your brightness; take good care you are not snuffed out by pride. Preserve what you have been made, so that you may glory in your maker. After all, what were you, man? Everyman, notice how you were born; even if you were born a noble, you were born naked. What's nobility, anyway? At birth, poor and rich are equally naked. Or perhaps because you were born a noble, you can live as long as you like? You came in when you didn't know, you go out when you don't want to. Finally, let the graves be examined, and the bones of the rich told apart.

### NOTES

1. So Fischer and Kunzelmann. There is no suggestion about where the sermon was preached; just as likely in Hippo Regius as anywhere else.

2. See Lk 1:13-20.

3. That is, Christ.

4. See Gn 2:7.

5. See Gn 3:1-6.

6. Translating *in paenitentia*, which Augustine's version of the gospel may well have read at Mt 3:11, as if it were the same as *in paenitentiam*, the Vulgate's correct reading. Augustine almost certainly understood it in the same sense, anyway.

7. See Ps 91:12.

8. Just *Altitudinis nostrae* in the Latin; but *altitudo* means both height and depth, though Augustine primarily has height, or exaltation, in mind; but then the way to that is through the depths of humiliation.

9. See Lk 1:41.

10. Not very easy to do, in this instance!

11. A note added by the stenographer.

## SERMON 290

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Date: 414<sup>1</sup>

*Testimonials given to each other by John the Baptist and Christ*

1. Saint John,<sup>2</sup> not the evangelist, but the Baptist, was sent before the face of Christ to *prepare his ways* (Mk 1:2). The testimonial Christ gives to John is, *Among those born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11). The testimonial John gives to Christ is, *The one who is coming after me is greater than I am, and I am not worthy to undo the strap of his sandal* (Jn 1:27). Let us consider each testimonial, the one given by the Lord to the servant, and the one given by the servant to the Lord.

What is the Lord's testimonial about the servant? *Among those born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist*. What is the servant's testimonial about the Lord? *The one who is coming after me is greater than I am*.<sup>3</sup> So if, among those born of women, there has not arisen any greater than John the Baptist, what must be the one who is greater than he is? John was a great man, but a man; Christ is greater than John, because he is both God and man. Both were born in a wonderful way, the herald and the judge, the lamp and the day, the voice and the Word, the servant and the Lord; the servant of a barren woman, the Lord of a virgin. The Lord made a servant for himself in a barren womb, of an old man as father, and an old woman as mother; and the same Lord made himself flesh in the womb of the virgin without a man as father, as he had made the first man without either father or mother.<sup>4</sup>

*Nobody has arisen among those born of women greater than John the Baptist*. So great did John seem, that he was even thought by some people to be the Christ. And he didn't follow the error of others in his pride, or have the audacity to say, "I am what you think"; but, to his credit, he recognized himself, so that the servant humbled himself at the feet of his Lord, and at the strap of his sandal, to avoid the lamp being blown out by the wind of pride.

*Why only the birthdays of Christ and of John the Baptist are celebrated, and not of any of the other saints*

2. Then again, it's because John's birth signified a great mystery or sacrament, that he is the only one of the just whose birthday is celebrated by the Church.<sup>5</sup> The Lord's birthday is also celebrated, but precisely as the Lord's. Give me any other servant besides John, among the patriarchs, among the prophets, among the apostles, whose birthday is celebrated by the Church of Christ. We celebrate the day of their martyrdom for a great many of his servants; the day of their birth for none except John.

When the gospel was read, you heard in what order they were both born, the forerunner and the ruler, and as I said a moment ago, the herald and the judge, the voice and the Word. The angel Gabriel announces John, the very same angel Gabriel announces the Lord Jesus Christ. The first goes ahead, the second follows; the first goes ahead by way of serving, the second follows by way of ruling. He follows, you see, in his birth, he has precedence as ruler, because John himself was also created by Christ, and after him Christ was created, being both creator and created; creator before his mother, creator of his mother, created in his mother.

And what am I saying, creator before his mother? *Before Abraham I am* (Jn 8:58); that's what he said himself, the gospel speaks. Listen to it, or read it. But that's little enough, being the creator before Abraham; he's the creator before Adam, creator before heaven and earth, before all the angels, and the whole spiritual creation, *thrones, dominations, principalities and powers* (Col 1:16), creator before all things whatsoever. Because *in the beginning*, not was made the Word, but *was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; this was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him* (Jn 1:1-3). If all things, *visible and invisible* (Col 1:16), *heaven and earth* (Gn 1:1), then also the virgin Mary; because the virgin Mary too is of the earth, and Christ, the maker of the earth, was made from the earth, because *truth has sprung from the earth* (Ps 85:11).

*The great, significant mystery of the sandal strap*

3. So then, very briefly I bring to your graces' attention a great, significant sacrament or mystery. Since there were going to be many people who would think Christ was only a human being, was nothing more than a human being, that's why a great human being, than whom there was none greater in all humanity, John, bore him witness, by submitting to him, bowing down before him, humbling himself before him. How very humble he would have shown himself to be, if he had said that he was worthy to undo the strap of his sandal! Pay close attention to the great sacrament of the sandal strap. How very humble John would have been, even if he had said he was worthy! What, then, did he make himself by saying he was unworthy?<sup>6</sup> That's the reason why note was taken of the day of his birth, and why its celebration has been committed to the Church.

*The responses of Zachary and of Mary to the angel's message compared*

4. But there is another point of the greatest interest, besides one of the mothers being a virgin, the other a barren woman; one giving birth by the Holy Spirit to the Son of God, our Lord, the other giving birth to the Lord's forerunner by her aged husband. Consider this point also. Zachary didn't believe. How did he not believe? He asked the angel how he could know the truth of what he had promised, because he himself was an old man, and his wife was far advanced in years. And the angel said to him, *Behold, you shall be dumb, and not able to speak until the day when these things come about, because you have not believed my words, which will be fulfilled in their time* (Lk 1:20).

The same angel comes to Mary, announces to her that Christ is going to be born of her in the flesh, and Mary says something of the same kind. He, you see, had said, *How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years* (Lk 1:18). And he's told, *Behold, you shall be dumb, and you will not be able to speak until the day when these things are fulfilled, because you have not believed my words*. And he was given the punishment of dumbness, earned by his unbelief. What had the prophet said about John? *The voice of one crying in the desert* (Is 40:3). Zachary is dumb, and he is going to beget the voice. It was because he did not believe that he was made speechless; rightly was he struck dumb, until the voice should be born. After all, if it rightly says, or rather because it certainly does rightly say in the holy psalm *I have believed, therefore have I spoken* (Ps 116:10); then because he didn't believe, he very properly didn't speak.

But please, Lord, I'm knocking together with those who are listening to me; open up to us, explain the meaning of this problem. Zachary asks the angel about ways and means, how he was to know the truth of the announcement just made to him, since he was an old man, and his wife advanced in years; and he's told, *Since you have not believed, you shall be dumb*. Christ is announced to the virgin Mary, and she asks about ways and means, and says to the angel, *How shall this come about, since I do not know a man?* (Lk 1:34). He said, *How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years*. She said, *How shall this come about, since I do not know a man?* He is told, "You shall be dumb, because you don't believe"; while she is given an explanation, and does not have silence imposed on her. *How shall this come about, since I do not know a man? And the angel said, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you* (Lk 1:35). There's how what you are asking will come about; there's how you do not know a man, and yet you will give birth; there's how: it's because *the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you*. You need have no fear of the heat of lust, under the shade of such holiness.

Now why is this? If we look at the words, either both of them believed, or both of them doubted, Zachary and Mary. Yes, but while we are capable of hearing the words, God is able also to question the heart.

*While Mary was asking her question, she wasn't doubting the promise*

5. We must understand, dearly beloved, that when Zachary said, *How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years* (Lk 1:18), he was expressing his lack of hope, not asking for information; whereas Mary on the contrary, when she said, *How shall this come about, since I do not know a man?* (Lk 1:34), was asking for information, not expressing any lack of hope. While she was asking a question, she was not doubting the promise. O truly full of grace! That, after all, is how she was greeted by the angel: *Hail, full of grace* (Lk 1:28). Who could unfold the fullness of this grace? For this grace, who could adequately give thanks?

Man is made, and through free will man perishes, and the one who made him is found to have been made man, in order that what he made may not perish. The Word in the beginning, God with God, through whom all things were made, is made flesh: *And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14). The Word becomes flesh, but flesh is added to the Word, the Word does not perish in the flesh. Oh what grace! In what way were we ever worthy to have it?

*The hungry he has filled with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away—as in the case of the Pharisee and the tax collector*

6. But notice what holy Mary herself says, full of faith, full of grace, soon to be a mother, always to remain a virgin. What does she say, among other things—to speak about all of them in turn would be far too much? What does she say? *The hungry he has filled with good things, and sent the rich empty away* (Lk 1:53). Who are the hungry? The humble, the needy. Who are the rich? Proud and self-important people. I won't send you far to find them; I'll show you now in one and the same temple one of those rich who are sent away empty, and one of those poor who are filled with good things.

*Two men went up into the temple to pray; one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee said.* What did he say? Observe the rich man, burping his undigested food, breathing out the fumes of his intoxication, with pride though, not with justice. *God, he says, I thank you, because I am not like other men, robbers, unjust, adulterers, like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess* (Lk 18:10-12). Had you come to pray, or to praise yourself? Everything you've said is about what you have; nothing at all have you asked for, as one in need. So how have you come to pray? *I thank you, Lord.* He doesn't say, "Lord give me grace."<sup>8</sup> *Because I am not like other men, robbers, unjust, adulterers.* So are you the only just man? *Because I am not like this tax-collector here.* You're reviling, not rejoicing.<sup>9</sup> *I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all I possess.* O you rich man, so eminently empty!<sup>10</sup>

Come, poor man, come along, hungry tax collector; or rather, stand there, where you're standing. *The tax collector, you see, was standing a long way off.* But the Lord was drawing near to the humble. *Nor did he dare to raise his eyes to heaven.* Where he didn't raise his eyes to, that's where he had his heart. *But*

he was striking his breast, as he said, *Lord, be favorable to me, a sinner* (Lk 18:13). O you hungry man, so eminently fillable with good things!

*The Lord's judgment between the two of them; the Pelagian (not mentioned by name) doesn't even, like the Pharisee, give thanks*

7. Lord, you have heard the dispute; deliver your judgment. Listen to the judgment delivered between the parties. The loser cannot appeal, because there is nobody he can appeal to. I mean, he can't appeal from the Son to the Father. You see, *God the Father does not judge anyone; but he has given all judgment to the Son* (Jn 5:22). So let Truth deliver judgment between the parties. *Amen*, he says, *I tell you, that this one went down justified from the temple, rather than that Pharisee*. Why so, please? On what principle of justice? Do you want to hear? *Because everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted* (Lk 18:14). By whom shall this one be exalted, and the one who exalts himself be humbled?<sup>11</sup> *Because the hungry he has filled with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away* (Lk 1:53).

Come now, and flaunt your riches;<sup>12</sup> boast about yourself, and say, "I am rich."

How rich?

"If I wish to be, I'm just; if I don't wish to be, I'm not just. I have it in my power to be just, and not to be just."

Don't you ever hear in the psalm, *Those who trust in their own strength* (Ps 49:6)? So then God has given you flesh, God has given you senses, God given you a soul, God given you a mind, God given you intelligence; it's you who give yourself justice? What's the flesh, what are the senses, what is the soul, what is the mind, what is intelligence, without justice? Won't all these, if they lack justice, merely be ripe for punishment? So you're so rich, are you, that while God has given you the lesser things, you give yourself the more important ones?

You wrongly rich man, you eminently emptiable rich man—if, that is, you really do have what you have said you have; *What have you got that you have not received?* (1 Cor 4:7). You haven't even learned from that proud and rich Pharisee, at least to give thanks to the Lord for these things you have said you have.

## NOTES

1. Fischer and Kunzelmann actually suggest between 412 and 416; I take the mean. No suggestion is made about the place; it is as likely to have been his own Church of Hippo Regius as anywhere else.

2. The Maurists think the opening section of the sermon has been curtailed, and inform us that

some manuscripts add, after the title, *Cujus hodie celebramus natalem praecursoris Domini*: Whose birthday as the forerunner of the Lord we are celebrating today. But it is unlikely, though not impossible, that Augustine would begin a sermon with a relative clause in the genitive case; and if he had done so here, he would surely have put *praecursor* in the nominative, in apposition to *Sanctus Joannes*.

3. In fact, John never said this, though of course he thought it; what he said in the text quoted was, *The one who is coming after me was before me*—at least in some manuscripts, at Jn 1:27. He repeats it at 1:30. Augustine's Latin version may well have had *major* instead of *prior*, as in Mt 3:11 and Lk 3:16; they probably had *major* instead of the Vulgate's correct *fortior*.

4. See Gn 2:7.

5. The birth of the blessed virgin Mary, 8 September, was introduced into the calendar much later, presumably after the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Augustine will have something to say about the greatness of Mary later on in this sermon in section 5, where he is comparing her to Zachary. But nowhere does he consider her greatness in comparison with that of John. With reference to her, our Lord's words about none being greater than John now require some pious interpretation from Catholic theologians.

6. So read some manuscripts. Others, followed by the editors read simply, "What did he do, by saying he was unworthy?": *Quid fecit, dicendo se indignum?* instead of what I have translated, *Quid se fecit, dicendo indignum?*

7. He seems to be identifying Mary's grace, the grace she was full of, with the grace of the incarnation as such, the grace bestowed generally on us all. This, in principle—though I do not know that he ever develops the idea—will place her in a different class from John the Baptist.

8. Instead he "does grace" to the Lord, "thanks" and "grace" being the same word in Latin. He says *gratias tibi ago* instead of *Da mihi gratiam*.

9. *Insultas, non exsultas*.

10. *Extnantendum*.

11. A fairly straightforward question. The Maurists and later editors, however, print it as a statement, to be construed rather clumsily thus: "By the one by whom this one shall be exalted, shall the one who exalts himself also be humbled." Perhaps they are right.

12. He is addressing the archetypal Pelagian.



## SERMON 291

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Date: 415<sup>1</sup>

*Because the God-man was going to come through a virgin, a marvelous man preceded him, born of a barren woman*

1. There is no need for you to be told what day we are celebrating today, because you all heard, when the gospel was read. Today we have welcomed Saint John, the forerunner of the Lord, the son of a barren woman announcing the son of a virgin, but still the servant announcing the Lord. You see, because the God-man was going to come through the virgin, he was preceded by a marvelous man, born of a barren woman; so that the one, whose sandal strap the marvelous man said he was not fit to undo, might be recognized as the God-man. Admire John and marvel at him as much as you can; by your admiring him, it is Christ who profits. I say it is Christ who profits, not because you are bestowing any advantage on Christ, but in order that you may thereby make a profit in Christ.

So admire John and marvel at him as much as you can. You heard what you should marvel at. He is announced to his father, a priest, by an angel; the angel deprives his father of his voice for not believing; he remains dumb, waiting for the restoration of his tongue in the birth of his son. A barren woman conceived, an old woman, what's more, conceived; a double obstacle to childbearing, barrenness and old age. The angel declares what sort of man he will be; what he says is duly fulfilled in his regard; and what is supremely marvelous, he is filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. Then, as holy Mary comes, he leaps in the womb, and greets with movements the one he could not greet with words. He is born, he gives his father back his voice; the father, speaking, gives his son his name; everybody marvels at such grace.<sup>2</sup> What else, after all, was it, but grace? I mean to say, when had John deserved well of God? When can he have deserved well of God, before he existed to deserve anything? O grace truly given gratis, and for nothing!<sup>3</sup>

*If the child will be so great, because the hand of the Lord is with him,  
Christ is the hand of the Lord*

2. The people marvel, they are all amazed, and they express their feelings, so that something might be written for us to read: *“What will this child be, do you think? For the hand of the Lord is with him (Lk 1:66). He breaks the bounds of human nature. We know children; but what will this child be, do you think?”*

Why do you say, *What will this child be, do you think? For the hand of the Lord is with him?*

“That the hand of the Lord is with him, we already know; but what he will be, we don’t know. Obviously, he will be very great, because he has begun so great. What will he be, who is so great while so small?”

What will he be? Feeble human wits are blunted, the hearts of all who consider the matter start trembling: *What will this child be, do you think?*

He will be great; but what will the one be who is greater than this one? If this one who has just begun is going to be so great, what will the one be who already was? But what I have said, “who already was”? Zachary too was before John, much more before John were Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Certainly heaven and earth were before John. What will the one be who was in the beginning? *In the beginning*, you see, which is before John, and before every human being, *God made heaven and earth (Gn 1:1)*. But through what did he make them, you ask? *In the beginning*, not, “God made the Word,” but *was the Word. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was*, not any sort of word, but *the Word was God. All things were made through him (Jn 1:1.3)*. And in the last days the one who was, was made, to prevent what he had made from perishing.

*What will this child be, do you think? For the hand of the Lord is with him.* If the child will be so great because the hand of the Lord is with him, what about the hand of the Lord itself? Christ, you see, is the hand of the Lord, the Son of God is the hand of God, the Word of God is the hand of God. What else is the hand of God, after all, but that through which all things were made? *What will this child be, do you think? For the hand of the Lord is with him.* O human feebleness, what are you going to do over the judge, when you are as hesitant as this about the herald? But even here, what is it I have really said? Let me come back to the consideration of ordinary human usage; and what is it I have said? I’ve said “herald,” I’ve said “judge”; a herald is a human being, and a judge is a human being. I have said what was outwardly apparent; who could ever express what was concealed inwardly? *The Word became flesh (Jn 1:14)*; not, however, that the Word was turned into flesh. The Word became flesh by receiving what he was not, not by losing what he was. Here we are, we have been marveling at the birth of his herald, which we celebrate today; but let us see on whose account it happened.

*What prayer, precisely, of Zachary’s was answered?*

3. The angel Gabriel came to Zachary, not to his wife Elizabeth, John’s mother; the angel Gabriel, I repeat, came to Zachary, not to Elizabeth. Why?

Because it was through Zachary that John was going to be in Elizabeth. So the angel, in announcing that John was going to come by being born, went, not to the receptacle of the womb, but to the source of the seed. He announced they would both have a son, but he made the announcement to the father. John, after all, was going to come from the marriage of male and female. And once more the same Gabriel came to Mary, not to Joseph; to the one from whom that flesh was to begin, from whom it was to take its starting point, it was to her that the angel came.

But how did the angel foretell his future son to the father, the priest Zachary? *Do not be afraid, Zachary*, he said, *your prayer has been heard* (Lk 1:13). Well, what's this, my brothers and sisters? Did that priest really enter the holy of holies<sup>4</sup> just to pray for children from the Lord? It's unthinkable.

Someone says, "How can you prove that? I mean, Zachary didn't give any indication of what he was praying for."

There is just one point I will make very briefly: if he had asked for a son, he would have believed when he was told he would have one. The angel says a son would be born to him, he doesn't believe; had he really asked for that? Whoever prays without hope? Or whoever fails to believe in his hopes? If you don't hope, why ask? If you hope, why not believe?

So what then? *Your prayer*, he said, *has been heard, for behold Elizabeth will conceive and bear you a son* (Lk 1:13). Why? Because your prayer has been heard. If Zachary said, "Why? Is this what I asked for?" clearly the angel would not be deceived, nor deceive, would he, when he said, *Your prayer has been heard; for behold your wife is going to give birth?* But why was this said? Because he was sacrificing on behalf of the people; the priest was offering sacrifice on behalf of the people, the people were expecting the Christ, John was the one who would announce the Christ.

*Mary, blessed among women*

4. The same angel, however, said to the virgin Mary, *Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you* (Lk 1:28); the one who will be in you is already with you. *Blessed are you among women* (Lk 1:42).<sup>5</sup> Holy scripture bears witness to the fact that in the proper usage of the Hebrew language all females are habitually called women; in case some of you, perhaps, may be astonished and scandalized, if you are not used to hearing the scriptures. There's a place in the scriptures where the Lord says openly, *Set apart the women who have not known man* (Nm 31:18, LXX). In any case, call to mind those origins of ours; when Eve was made from the man's side, what does scripture say? *He removed a rib from him, and built it into a woman* (Gn 2:21-22). She is already called a woman, taken indeed from the man, but not yet united to the man. So now, when you hear from the angel, *Blessed are you among women*, take it in such a way, as if it were saying, in our usage, *Blessed are you among females*.

*The difference between Mary's question to the angel, and Zachary's*

5. Zachary is promised a son, and holy Mary is promised a son, and she says almost exactly the same words as Zachary had spoken. I mean, what had Zachary said? *How will this happen to me? For I am an old man, and my wife is barren, and advanced in her days* (Lk 1:18). And what did holy Mary say? *How will this come about?* (Lk 1:34). Similarity of words, dissimilarity of hearts. We may hear the similarity of the words with our ears, but we can only know the dissimilarity of hearts by the angel's declaration. David sinned, and when he was rebuked by the prophet, he said, *I have sinned*, and was immediately told *Your sin has been forgiven you* (2 Sm 12:13). Saul sinned, and when he was rebuked by the prophet, he said *I have sinned*; and his sin was not forgiven, but the wrath of God remained upon him.<sup>6</sup> What can this mean, but similarity of words, dissimilarity of hearts? Human beings can hear words, God inspects hearts.<sup>7</sup>

So that those words of Zachary did not express faith, but doubt and lack of hope, is something the angel saw, the angel indicated by depriving him of his voice, condemning his unbelief. Holy Mary, however, says, *How shall this come about, because I do not know a man?* (Lk 1:34). Recognize the virgin's purpose. When would she ever say, if she were going to sleep with a man, *How shall this come about?* I mean, if it was to come about in the way it usually comes about with all babies, she wouldn't say *How will it come about?* But she was mindful of her purpose, and aware of her holy vow, because she knew what she had vowed.<sup>8</sup> So by saying, *How shall this come about, since I do not know a man*, as she didn't know how this could come about, that children should be born, except to married women who slept with their husbands, something which she had made up her mind to know nothing of; by saying, *How shall this come about?* she was inquiring about the manner of it, not doubting God's omnipotence. "*How shall this come about? What is the way in which this will come about? You are telling me I will have a son, you find my spirit ready, tell me the way of it.*" *The holy virgin, after all, could have been afraid, or certainly been ignorant of God's plan, of how he wished her to have a son, as though he had disapproved of her virgin's vow. I mean, what if he were to say, "Marry, unite yourself to a husband"?*

God wouldn't say this; after all, he had accepted the virgin's vow, as God; he had accepted from her, what he himself had inspired her with. "So tell me, messenger of God, *how shall this come about?*" Observe the angel, who knows; observe her, asking, not distrusting. So because the angel could see she was asking, not distrusting, he did not refuse to be her instructor. "Let me tell you how: your virginity will be guaranteed, just you believe the truth, keep your virginity, receive it whole and entire. Since your faith is whole, your integrity too will be untouched. Finally, listen to how this shall come about: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.* Such shade knows nothing of the heat of lust. *For that reason, because the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High overshadow you* (Lk 1:35); because you are conceiving by faith, because you will have a child in

your womb by believing, not by lying with a man, *for that reason, the holy child that will be born of you shall be called the Son of God*" (Lk 1:35).

*Mary's being the mother of God was entirely a matter of grace, as the angel's greeting indicated*

6. What are you, that are due to give birth later on? How have you deserved this? Where have you received it from? Where from, that the one who made you will be made in you? Where, I repeat, does such a great good as this come to you from? You are a virgin, you are holy, you have vowed your vow; but it is much that you have deserved, or rather it is much that you have received. I mean, how have you deserved this: that the one who made you is made in you, the one through whom you were made is made in you? Or rather, the one through whom heaven and earth were made, through whom all things were made, the Word of God is made flesh in you, by receiving flesh, not by losing divinity. And the Word is united to flesh, and the Word is coupled with flesh; and the bridal chamber of this astonishing marriage is your womb; and of this astonishing marriage, I repeat, the bridal chamber is your womb; from which *the bridegroom himself comes forth from his chamber* (Ps 19:5). Conceived, he finds you a virgin; born, he leaves you a virgin. He bestows fruitfulness upon you, he does not take integrity from you. Where does all this come to you from?

I appear to be questioning the virgin rather impudently, and knocking somewhat rudely at her modest ears with this voice of mine. But I can see the virgin, modest indeed, and yet answering me and giving me some advice: "You are asking me where all this comes to me from? I am rather shy of telling you in reply about my own blessings; listen to the angel's greeting, and acknowledge in me your salvation. Believe the one whom I believed. You are asking where all this comes to me from? Let the angel answer."

Tell me, angel, where did Mary get all this from?

"I have already said where, when I greeted her: *Hail, full of grace*" (Lk 1:28).

## NOTES

1. As with Sermon 290, Fischer and Kunzelmann suggest between 412 and 416. With that sermon I took the mean, 414. Now they will be more positive about Sermon 293, and assign it definitely to 413. So here I propose 415; it could equally well be, according to their estimate, 412 or 416.

2. See Lk 1:66—and of course, the whole long chapter. I don't know whether Augustine knew that the name John means, in Hebrew, "the Lord is gracious." Probably not, or he would have made much of it. But it is singularly apt to his whole theme.

3. *O gratia gratis data!* This becomes much later on a technical expression to distinguish those graces or charisms, which are listed in 1 Cor 12:4-10, from habitual or sanctifying grace. Augustine had no such distinction in mind here. In any case all grace, including habitual grace, is given gratis, as the very word implies.

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

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

6. See 1 Sm 15:30.35.

7. See 1 Sm 16:7.

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

## SERMON 292

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

Date: 399<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

*Why he wished to be baptized by a man*

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

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

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

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

*Donatist misconceptions about baptism*

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

How can you prove this?

"I can prove it," he says.

On what evidence?

"That of the gospels," he says.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"God forbid," he says.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“But what I don’t know,” he says, “doesn’t contaminate me.”

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

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

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

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

"Yes, born," you say.

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

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

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

"Yes, of God."

Why this one in particular of God?

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

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

"I dare not," he says.

So he too is from a good one?

"Yes, from a good one."

From what good one?

"From God."

What about that other person?

"From a chaste man."

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

"Good."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## NOTES

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

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

3. See Lk 1:44.

4. See Jn 3:22-26.

5. The Donatist clergy.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18. See Acts 9:17-18.

19. See Mk 2:3-12.

20. See Jn 10:1-6.

21. *Si sapienter admittis*.

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

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

## SERMON 293

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Date: 413<sup>1</sup>

*The replies of Zachary and of Mary to the angel's message compared*

1. It's the feast of Saint John, about whose birth we heard with wonder when the gospel was being read, that we are celebrating today. What must be the glory of the judge, if the herald's is as great as this? What must the one who is to come as the way be like, if this is what the one is like who prepares the way? The Church observes the birth of John as in some way sacred; and you won't find any other of the ancient worthies<sup>2</sup> whose birth we officially celebrate. We celebrate John's, we also celebrate Christ's. This point cannot be passed over in silence, and if I may not perhaps be able to explain it in a manner that such an important matter deserves, it is still worth thinking about a little more deeply and fruitfully than usual.

John is born of an old woman who is barren; Christ is born of a young woman who is a virgin. Barrenness gives birth to John, virginity to Christ. The normal and proper age of parents was lacking with the birth of John, no marital embrace occurred for the birth of Christ. The former is announced in the declaration of the angel, with the angel's annunciation the latter is conceived. That John will be born is not believed, and his father is struck dumb; that Christ will be born is believed, and he is conceived by faith. First of all faith makes its entry into the heart of the virgin, and there follows fruitfulness in the mother's womb.

And yet, nearly the same words were used by Zachary, when the angel announced John: *By what shall I know this? For I myself am an old man, and my wife is already advanced in her days* (Lk 1:18); and by holy Mary when the angel announced that she was going to give birth: *How shall this come about, since I do not know a man?* (Lk 1:34)—practically the same words. Zachary is told, *Behold, you shall be dumb, and unable to speak, until all this comes about, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time* (Lk 1:20); while Mary gets the answer, *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; for that reason, the holy child that will be born of you shall be called the Son of God* (Lk 1:35). He is given a rebuke, she is given information. He is told, "because you didn't believe"; she

is told, "Here is the answer to your question." They are almost the same words: *By what shall I know this?* and, *How shall this come about?* But the difference didn't escape the one who heard the words, and could see the heart. In the words of each the thoughts of each were hidden; hidden, though, from human beings, not from the angel; or rather, not hidden from the one who was speaking through the angel.

Finally, John is born when the daylight begins to diminish, and the night begins to grow longer. Christ is born when the night begins to be curtailed, and the day begins to increase. And John himself, it seems, takes a look back at this sign contained in the birthdays of them both, when he says, *It is necessary for him to grow, but for me to diminish* (Jn 3:30). I have proposed some matters for inquiry, and listed in advance things that need to be discussed. But I have introduced these points, even if we are not up to examining all the twists and turns of such a great mystery, either for lack of capacity, or of time. You will be taught much better by the one who speaks in you even when we aren't present; the one whom you think loving thoughts about, whom you have taken to your hearts, whose temple you have become.

*John a kind of boundary between the Old and New Testaments*

2. So John seems to have been inserted as a kind of boundary between the two Testaments, the Old and the New. I mean, that he is somehow or other a boundary, as I said, is what the Lord himself indicates, when he says, *The law and the prophets were until John* (Lk 16:16). So he represents the old, and heralds the new. Because he represents the old, he is born of an elderly couple; because he represents the new, he is revealed as a prophet in his mother's womb. Not yet born, you remember, at Mary's arrival he leapt in his mother's womb.<sup>3</sup> Already he had been marked out there, designated before he was born; whose forerunner he would be was already shown, even before he saw him. These are divine matters, and exceed the measure of human frailty. Finally he's born, he receives a name, his father's tongue is loosed.<sup>4</sup>

Now refer what happened to the figurative significance of things; only don't assume that what happened didn't happen, just because you can perhaps say what it signified.<sup>5</sup> Refer this thing that happened to the significance of things, and observe a great mystery. Zachary is struck dumb, and loses his voice, until John, the Lord's forerunner, is born, and releases his voice. What does Zachary's silence mean, but prophecy being obscure, and before the proclamation of Christ somehow or other concealed and shut up? It is released and opened up by his arrival, it becomes clear when the one who was being prophesied is about to come. The releasing of Zachary's voice at the birth of John has the same significance as the tearing of the veil at the crucifixion of Christ.<sup>6</sup> If John were going to proclaim himself, he would not be opening Zachary's mouth. Zachary's tongue is released, because a voice is being born. Because when John was already heralding the Lord, he was asked, *Who are you?* and he replied, *I am the voice of one crying in the desert* (Jn 1:22-23).

*John the voice, Christ the Word*

3. John a voice, the Lord, however, *in the beginning was the Word* (Jn 1:1). John a voice for a time, Christ the eternal Word in the beginning. Take away the word, and what is a voice? Where there is no meaning, it's just an empty noise. A voice without a word knocks at the ear, it doesn't build up the intellect. All the same, in the business of building up our intellects, let's observe the order of things. If I'm thinking what I am to say, there is already a word in my mind; but as I wish to speak to you, I look for a way of how what is already in my mind may also be found in yours. Looking for this way of how the word that is already in my mind may reach you and lodge in your mind, I take hold of my voice, and with the voice I've taken hold of I speak to you. The sound of my voice conducts to you the understanding of my word; and when the sound of the voice has conducted to you the understanding of the word, the sound is indeed over and done with; but the word which the sound conducted to you is now in your mind, and hasn't departed from mine. So the sound, having conveyed the word to you, doesn't the very sound seem to you to say, *It is necessary for him to grow, but for me to diminish?* The sound of the voice rang out to perform its service, and departed, as if saying, *This joy of mine is now complete* (Jn 3:30.29).

Let us hold on to the Word, let us not lose the Word conceived in the very marrow of our minds. Do you want to see the voice disappearing, and the divinity of the Word remaining? John's baptism—where is it now? It performed its service and departed. Now it's Christ's baptism that is frequented. We all believe in Christ, we all hope for salvation in Christ; that's the Word the sound of the voice conveyed. It's difficult, you see, to distinguish word from voice, and that's why John himself was thought to be the Christ. The voice was thought to be the Word; but the voice identified himself, in order not to offend the Word. *I am not*, he said, *the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet*. They answered, *So who are you? I am*, he said, *the voice of one crying in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord* (Jn 1:20-23). *The voice of one crying in the desert*, the voice of one shattering the silence: *Prepare a way for the Lord*; as though to say, "The reason I am sounding off is to introduce him into your hearts; but he won't agree to enter where I am introducing him, unless you prepare a way." What is *Prepare a way*, but "Make appropriate supplications"? What is *Prepare a way*, but "Think humble thoughts"?

Here's an example of humility from John himself. He is thought to be the Christ, he says he isn't what he's thought to be, and he doesn't use the mistake of other people to further his own pretensions. If he had said, "Yes, I am the Christ," how readily he would have been believed, since he was believed to be so even without his saying it! He didn't say it; he identified himself, he pointed out the difference between the Christ and himself, he humbled himself. He saw where his salvation lay; he understood that he was the lamp, and he was afraid of being blown out by the wind of pride.

*I have prepared a lamp for my Christ;  
his enemies I will clothe with confusion*

4. God, you see, liked this arrangement, whereby a man of such great grace, that he could be thought to be the Christ, should bear witness to Christ. In a word, *among those born of women*, as Christ said himself, *nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11). If there was never a man greater than this man, the one who is greater than he is, must be more than a man. Christ is thus bearing very weighty witness to himself—but to eyes that are bleary and weak the evidence that the day gives about itself is not very telling; weak eyes shrink from daylight, bear with lamplight. That is why the day that was to come sent a lamp ahead. But he sent the lamp ahead into the hearts of believers, in order to confound the hearts of unbelievers. *I have prepared*, he says, *a lamp for my Christ*; it's God the Father speaking through the prophet. *I have prepared a lamp for my Christ*; John, a herald for the Savior, a forerunner for the judge who is to come, a friend for the bridegroom to be. *I have prepared*, he says, *a lamp for my Christ*. Why have you prepared it? *His enemies I will clothe with confusion; but upon him my sanctification shall blossom* (Ps 132:17-18).

How were his enemies clothed with confusion by means of this lamp? Let's scrutinize the gospel. The Jews, to discredit him, said to the Lord, *By what authority are you doing these things? If you are the Christ, tell us openly* (Lk 20:2).<sup>7</sup> They were looking for a pretext, not for faith; something to catch him out with, not something to be liberated by. Anyway, the one who could see their hearts, notice what answer he gave, to confound them with the lamp. *I will ask you too*, he said, *one question: tell me, John's baptism, where is it from? From heaven, or from men?* They were immediately sent staggering backward, and although the daylight was only shining gently, compelled to fumble and blink,<sup>8</sup> since they were unable to gaze at that brilliance, and so they took refuge in the darkness of their hearts, and there they began to get very agitated among themselves, stumbling and falling about. *If we say*, they said—this to themselves, where they were thinking, but where he could see—*If we say*, they said, *It is from heaven, he will say to us, Why did you not believe him?* He, after all, had borne witness to Christ the Lord. *But if we say, From men, the people will stone us, because John was regarded as a great prophet. And they said, We do not know.* You don't know; you're in darkness, you're losing the light. How much better, after all, if darkness is occupying the human heart, to let the light in, not to lose it.<sup>9</sup> When they said, *We do not know*, the Lord said, *Neither do I tell you by what authority I am doing these things* (Lk 20:3-8). You see, I know in what mind you said *We don't know*; not because you wish to be taught, but because you are afraid to confess.

*The Word that was in the beginning came to us,  
the worthy to the unworthy*

5. This divine arrangement, as far as any human being can investigate it, better minds in a better way, lesser minds less effectively; this divine arrange-

ment is giving us hints of a great and significant mystery. Christ, you see, was going to come in the flesh, not anyone at all, not an angel, not an ambassador; but *he himself*<sup>10</sup> *will come and save you* (Is 35:4). It wasn't anyone who was going to come; and yet how was he going to come? He was going to be born in mortal flesh, to be a tiny infant, to be laid in a manger, wrapped in cradle clothes, nourished on milk; going to grow up, and finally even to be done to death. So in all these indications of humility there is indeed a pattern of an extreme humility. Who is showing this humility? Someone very exalted. How exalted? Don't inquire on earth, soar even beyond the stars. When you reach the heavenly hosts of angels, you will hear from them, "Go beyond us too." When you reach the *Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, and Powers* (Col 1:16), you will hear, "Go beyond us too; we too have been made." *All things were made through him* (Jn 1:3). Soar beyond the whole of creation; whatever has been made, whatever has been set up, whatever is changeable, whether with or without a body, soar beyond it all. You can't yet do it by seeing, soar on the wings of faith; arrive at the creator. With faith meanwhile going ahead of you, arrive at where it is leading you to,<sup>11</sup> arrive at the creator.

There, at last, gaze upon *In the beginning was the Word* (Jn 1:1). It was not, you see, made at some time or other; but it just was in the beginning. Not like creation, of which it is said, *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* (Gn 1:1). As for this that was in the beginning, there was no time when it was not.<sup>12</sup> So this that *was in the beginning, and was the Word with God, and the Word itself was God; and all things were made through him, and without him was made nothing; and in whom what was made is life* (Jn 1:2-4), this Word came to us. To whom? To us as worthy? Perish the thought! No, but to us as unworthy. After all, *Christ died for the ungodly* (Rom 5:6), and the unworthy, while being worthy himself. We were unworthy, you see, for him to have pity on; but he was worthy to take pity on us, to be told, *Because of your pity, Lord, deliver us*. Not because of any previous merits of ours, but *because of your pity, Lord, deliver us; and be lenient with our sins, because of your name* (Ps 79:9), not because of our merit. Obviously, not because of the merit of our sins, but *because of your name*. I mean, the merit of our sins, of course, is not reward, but revenge. So therefore, *because of your name*.

There you have the ones to whom he came, there you have the greatness of the one who came. How did he come to us? *The Word, clearly, became flesh, to dwell amongst us* (Jn 1:14). I mean, if he were only to come in his divinity, who could bear him, who could grasp him, who could take him in? But he took on what we were, so that we might not remain what we were; but what we were by nature, not by our own fault;<sup>13</sup> because, you see, he came as human to human beings, not however because he came as sinful to sinners. Of these two things, human nature and human fault, he took on one, cured the other. I mean, if he himself were to take on our iniquity, he himself would be seeking a savior. Though in fact he did take it on, to be endured and cured,<sup>14</sup> but not to be had as his own. And he appeared openly as a man among men, remaining hidden as God.

*The value of John's testimony to the mystery of God  
coming among us in the flesh*

6. So who can bear witness to this day, hidden in the flesh as in a kind of cloud? Bring on a lamp, let it bear witness to the day; but increase the power of this lamp to the extent that whoever is brighter than it is, must be the day. *Among those born of women there has not arisen one greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11). Oh, what an inexpressibly wonderful arrangement! I myself, brothers and sisters, when I think about all this, am filled with wonder at what John says about Christ, as recorded in the gospel. *I am not worthy*, he says, *to undo the strap of his sandal* (Jn 1:27). What could be said more humbly than that?<sup>15</sup> *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom stands and listens to him, and joyfully rejoices at the voice of the bridegroom* (Jn 3:29), not at his own. *We*, he says, *from his fullness have all received* (Jn 1:16). What great things he says about Christ, and how splendid, how lofty, how worthy! If, that is, anything can be worthily said about him by anyone.

And yet John doesn't go about among the Lord's disciples, he didn't follow him like Peter, like Andrew, like John, like the others. Instead he also gathered his own disciples around him, and although the Lord was established here with his disciples, John too had disciples. They were called John's disciples: the Lord himself was asked, *Why do John's disciples fast, while yours do not fast?* (Mk 2:18). This was undoubtedly a necessary qualification for a faithful forerunner, so that Christ might be proclaimed by one who could be considered a rival. John had disciples, so did Christ; he was teaching outside the circle, as it were, but as a witness he was close to him. That's why *among those born of women, nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11). There were prophets, they had disciples,<sup>16</sup> but not when Christ was present. Later on there were great apostles; but they were so because they were disciples of Christ themselves, not because they could have disciples along with Christ. This man has disciples, he gathers them round him, he baptizes. What are we to think: is he an outsider or an insider? No question, though; in reality he is an insider, so that as a man he may be set free by God; but in appearance he's an outsider, so that he may be believed as a witness.

Consider this point: witness was borne to the Lord, for example, by Peter, Andrew, John, and the rest; when it could be said to them, "You are praising one whose followers you are, proclaiming one whose adherents you are." Let the lamp come, confounding the enemies; he gathers disciples round him. Christ has them, John has them too. Christ baptizes, John baptizes too. And they come to John and say to him, *That one to whom you bore witness, look, he is baptizing; and all are coming to him* (Jn 3:26); hoping that like a jealous rival he might say something bad about Christ. But then the lamp burns all the more steadily, shines all the more brightly, then it is fed all the more securely, the more it distinguishes itself from the day. *I have already told you*, he said, *that I am not the Christ. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the one who comes from heaven is above all* (Jn 3:29.31). Then those who believed him were filled with admiration for Christ; then, on the other hand, the enemies were put to

confusion, when the one who could have been assumed to be jealous of him, was compelled, after a fashion, to sing his praises. The servant, you see, is forced to acknowledge the Lord, the creature forced to bear witness to the creator; not really forced, of course, because he does it freely. He's a friend, after all, not an envious rival; nor is he jealous for himself, but for the bridegroom.

*Christ the one mediator, not as God but as man*

7. That's how friends of the bridegroom behave; and there's a certain formality in human weddings, whereby apart from the other friends there is also a best man, a more intimate friend, responsible for the bridal chamber.<sup>17</sup> But this is the difference, and clearly it is a considerable one. What the best man is in human marriages, a man for a man, that John is for Christ, and Christ the bridegroom is at one and the same time God, and mediator between God and men; but this insofar as he is a man. Because insofar as he is God he is not a mediator, but equal to the Father, the same thing as the Father, with the Father one God. How could such sublimity, from which we were so far removed where we lay prostrate, ever mediate? In order to mediate, and be in the middle, let it assume something that it was not; but in order that we might reach it, let it remain what it was. There, you see, is God above us, there are we below him, and vast spaces lie in between; it's especially the huge gap caused by sin that sets us far apart, and casts us down.

When, over such vast distances, we were to come to God, by what road were we to come? God himself remains God; a man is attached to God, and becomes one person, so that he is not a half-God, as though God with a part of God, man with a part of man; but wholly God and wholly man; God the liberator, man the mediator; so that we come through him to him; not through someone else, nor not to him; but through what in him we are, to him through whom we were made. That's why the apostle, though he knew Christ was God—I mean, he himself said about him, when he was talking about the previous privileges of the Jews, *Whose are the fathers, from whom is Christ according to the flesh, who is God above all things, blessed for ever* (Rom 9:5); so while he knew him to be God, and God above all things, and for this reason, of course, above all things, that *all things were made through him* (Jn 1:3); when it came to the point of commending him as mediator, he didn't call him God; after all, he isn't mediator in virtue of being God, but mediator in virtue of having become man. That is our liberation. *For there is one God*. Because, of course, you are listening as Catholics, listening as well instructed Christians, listening wide awake. *One God*: just the Father alone? Just the Son alone? Just the Holy Spirit alone? But of course, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, one God. So: *One God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* (1 Tm 2:5). If he had said, "One God, and one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus," he would be taken to be, so to say, a lesser God. Indeed, it would be as though he were separated from that godhead of the Trinity, if there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ, as though he were not that God who was



said to be one. But because in the unity of God there is both Father and Son and Holy Spirit, let Christ's divinity hold on to the unity, while his humanity takes on the mediation.

*It is by this mediation that the whole lump,  
the whole mass of the human race is reconciled with God*

8. It is by this mediation that the whole mass or lump of the human race, which through Adam was estranged from God, is reconciled to him again. *For through Adam sin entered the world, and through sin death; and thus it passed over into all men, in that all have sinned* (Rom 5:12). Who could ever be rescued from this? Who could ever be set apart for mercy from this lump of wrath? *For who sets you apart? And what do you have that you have not received?* (1 Cor 4:7). So it's not merits that set us apart, but grace. I mean, if it's merits, it's owed us; if it's owed us, it isn't free, gratis; if it isn't gratis, it isn't grace. That's what the apostle says himself: *But if by grace, no longer as a result of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace* (Rom 11:6). We are saved through one man, adults, juveniles, old people, young people, little children, babies; it's through one man that we are saved. *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* (1 Tm 2:5). *Through one man death, and through one man the resurrection of the dead. Just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be made alive* (1 Cor 15:21-22).

*Nobody comes to death but through Adam,  
nobody to life but through Christ*

9. Here someone comes along, and says to me, "How *all*? So those too who are to be sent to gehenna, who will be damned with the devil, who will be tormented in eternal fire? How *all* and *all*?" Because nobody comes to death but through Adam, nobody to life but through Christ. If there were anyone else through whom we came to death, all wouldn't die in Adam. If there were anyone else through whom we come to life, all wouldn't be made alive in Christ.

*Infants too are in need of the liberator*

10. "So what then?" somebody says. "Does an infant too need the liberator?" Certainly it does; the proof is its mother faithfully hurrying to church with her baby to be baptized. The proof is its mother the Church receiving the baby to be washed clean, and either to be let go in peace, now set free,<sup>18</sup> or to be brought up in piety. Who would dare to take the stand against such a mother? Finally, the baby itself bears witness to its wretchedness by crying. As best it can, feeble nature, understanding practically nothing, gives its testimony; it doesn't begin with laughter, it begins with a wail.

Acknowledge its misery, extend it your help. Let all *clothe themselves in the bowels of mercy* (Col 3:12). We should speak for the babies all the more

mercifully, the less they can do it for themselves. The Church habitually comes to the assistance of orphans in watching over their interests; let us all speak for the babies, all of us come to their assistance, lest they should lose their heavenly inheritance. It was for their sakes too that their Lord became a baby. How can they not be included in his liberation, seeing that they were the first who were found worthy to die for him?<sup>19</sup>

*Christ is Jesus—Savior—for infants as much as for anybody else*

11. Finally, it was said about the Lord, the Savior, himself, when his approaching birth was being announced beforehand, *They will call his name Jesus; for it is he that will save his people from their sins* (Mt 1:21). We've got a Jesus, we have been given the meaning of this name. Why Jesus, which in English means "savior," why Jesus? *Because it is he that will save his people from their sins*. But he saved his people by the powerful hand of Moses, and with the help of the Most High, from the persecution and domination of the Egyptians. And Jesus<sup>20</sup> son of Nun saved his people from the persecutions and wars of the nations. The Judges saved the people, liberating them from the Philistines. The Kings did so too, liberating them from the domination of the surrounding and threatening nations. That's not the way Jesus saves; but *from their sins*. *They will call his name Jesus*. Why? *For it is he that will save his people*. What from? *From their sins*.

Now I'm questioning you about a baby; it's brought to church to be made a Christian, to be baptized, for the purpose, I rather think, of belonging to the people of Jesus. Which Jesus? The one who *saves his people from their sins*. If it has nothing in it that it needs to be saved from, take it away. Why don't we say to the mothers, "Take these babies away"? Jesus, after all, is the savior; if these haven't got anything in them to be saved from, take them away. *It is not the healthy that need the doctor, but those who are ill* (Mk 2:17). In this critical issue of the baby, someone<sup>21</sup> will be brazen enough to say to me, "He's Jesus for me, he isn't Jesus for this one."

So he's Jesus for you, not Jesus for this one? Hasn't he come to Jesus? Isn't the answer given for him, that he believes in Jesus? Have we instituted another baptism for babies, in which no forgiveness of sins occurs? Clearly, if this baby could speak for itself, it would refute the opposing voice, and cry out, "Give me the life of Christ. I died in Adam; give me the life of Christ, *in whose sight none is clean, not even the infant who has lived but a single day on the earth*" (Job 14:4, LXX).

Nobody would deny these babies grace, not even if he had to give them what was his own. Let mercy be shown to these unfortunates. What's the point of praising their innocence beyond measure? Let them find the savior, don't let them already have experience of the flatterer. Clearly, when infants are at such grave risk, we ought not even to be arguing about it, in case we appear even by arguing to put off their well-being and salvation. Bring it along, let it be washed, be liberated, be given life. *Just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be*

*made alive* (1 Cor 15:22). The only way it found of entering into the life of this world was through Adam; the only way it will find of avoiding the penalties of the next is through Christ. Why shut the only door in its face? *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* (1 Tm 2:5). Listen, he's crying out to you, *It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but those who are ill* (Mk 2:17). Why do you call this child healthy, if not simply to contradict the doctor?

*John also was born with sin; he said himself,  
"I ought to be baptized by you"*

12. "So was John too," he says, "about whom you were speaking, born with sin?"

You have definitely found someone born apart from sin, when you've found someone born apart from Adam. You won't snatch this affirmation from the hands of the faithful: *Through one man death, and through one man the resurrection of the dead. Just as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive* (1 Cor 15:21-22). *Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin death, and thus it passed over into all men.* If these were my words, could the affirmation be made more explicitly by me, more evidently, more completely? *Thus it passed over into all men, in that all have sinned* (Rom 5:12). You, now, go ahead and make an exception of John; if you set him apart from mankind, set him apart from that way of propagating the human race, set him apart from the embrace of male and female, then you will also set him apart from this affirmation.

The one, you see, who did wish to be set apart from it, was pleased to come through a virgin. Why are you trying to force me to discuss the merits of John? He greeted the Lord in the womb; but as I think, it was because he was greeting the one from whom he longed to receive salvation. He isn't asking for your utterly damaging defense. When the Lord came to be baptized by him, aware of the weakness he shared with us all, he said, *It is I who ought to be baptized by you* (Mt 3:14). The Lord was coming, you see, to recommend humility even in baptism, for the consecration of the sacrament itself. Because he received baptism as a young man, in the same way as he received circumcision as an infant. He received remedies to recommend them to us, not wounds.

But why should John say, *It is I who ought to be baptized by you*, if he was through and through clean of all fault, if there was nothing in him to be cured, if there was nothing in him to be cleansed? He says he is under an obligation, and you come along and clear him, to stop him being released from his obligations. *It is I*, he says, *who ought to be baptized by you*; I need it, it's necessary for me. And this was indeed granted him there. When the Lord, you see, entered the water, John was not out of the water.<sup>22</sup> What more needs to be said? Let the opposition, if possible, drop its case, because the savior even set his own herald free.

## NOTES

1. This date can be fixed exactly, because of a reference back to this sermon in Sermon 294, 1, which was preached on 27 June of this year. For the argument, see *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin* by O. Perler, pages 318-319. Kunzelmann and La Bonnardière also lend their support.

2. *In Patribus*, among the Fathers. But given our current use of this term in ecclesiastical English, that would convey quite the wrong idea. He means those whom elsewhere he spells out as patriarchs, prophets, and apostles.

3. See Lk 1:41.

4. See Lk 1:57-64.

5. Augustine always insists on what is called the literal or historical sense of scripture (in a way we would think rather naive nowadays, since it didn't take sufficient account of such literary forms as legend), as well as on its figurative or symbolic or mystical sense; which he regarded however, as more important—certainly more interesting and instructive.

6. See Mk 15:38. This signified the final revelation, the unveiling, of God's holiest secret; also the throwing open of this holiest of secrets to the whole world by the death of Christ. It is no longer to be the place of encounter between God and Israel alone.

7. He is introducing a text from Jn 10:24 into this quotation from Luke.

8. *Ad palpandum compulsi*. *Palpo* normally means to feel or stroke; but here he is clearly using it as though it were the verb that corresponds to *palpebrae*, eyelids.

9. *Lumen admittere, non amittere*.

10. God; it is to this passage that Jesus indirectly referred John's disciples, Mt 11:5.

11. Reading *quo perducit te*, instead of the text's *quae perducit te*: with faith which is going ahead leading you, arrive at the creator.

12. Echoing the Council of Nicaea's anathema against the alleged Arian statement, "There was a time when he was not."

13. He is certainly being less than lucid here. This qualification goes with what he took on, of course, not with what we were not to remain.

14. See Is 53:5-6.

15. Here a sentence is inserted that is so totally irrelevant to his immediate point, that I am sure it should be regarded as a pious reflection scribbled in the margin of someone's copy, which then found its way into the text. It runs: "What is more exalted than Christ, what more humble than the crucified?"

16. See, for example, Is 8:16.

17. I don't know if this is what he really means, as I am quite unfamiliar with the wedding customs of antiquity. The figure Augustine introduces in the Latin is the *paranymphus, amicus interior, conscius secreti cubicularis*.

18. If it dies in infancy.

19. See Mt 2:16.

20. Joshua; but the Greek and old Latin Bibles keep this Greek form of his name in the Old Testament. In this context, one either has to follow their example and call him Jesus, or else call Jesus Christ Joshua, which would be preposterous.

21. He means a Pelagian—possibly even Pelagius himself.

22. And so, he implies, Jesus did in fact baptize John, because by being baptized himself he consecrated the water in which John was standing—an ingenious idea.

## SERMON 293A

### ON THE BIRTH OF SAINT JOHN

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

*Augustine finds himself unexpectedly with this particular congregation*

1. It was the Lord who decided to provide your graces today with my voice and presence, and he did this not through any arrangements of ours, but according to his own wishes. So together with you I give him thanks, and render you the service of a sermon, which is my job, in which it is right and proper for me to serve you. Yours, though, dearly beloved, is to accept with charity whatever the servants of God have to offer you, and together with me to give him thanks, for granting us all the privilege of spending this day together.

*The superiority of John the Baptist over all other prophets*

2. So what else should we talk about today, but about the person whose birthday it is? So Saint John, born of a barren woman as the forerunner of the Lord who was born of a virgin, was to greet his Lord from the womb, to proclaim him after leaving the womb.<sup>2</sup> The barren woman was not suited to giving birth, the virgin did not have the means of giving birth; the barren woman bore the herald, the virgin the judge. But the Lord Jesus Christ, who was going to come from the virgin's womb, had sent many heralds ahead of him to mankind; all the prophets had been sent on ahead by him, but he was himself speaking in them; though he came after them, he was before them.<sup>3</sup>

So seeing that the Lord had sent many heralds before him, what was the extra special merit of this man, whose birthday is being brought to our notice today, what altogether superior excellence was to be found in him? I mean even the fact that his birthday is not unknown to us, just as his Lord's birthday is not unknown to us, is a sign of some special greatness. When other prophets were born we don't know; about John we have not been allowed to remain in ignorance. This next point too shows his unique merit, that the others foretold the Lord, and desired to see him, and did not see him; even if they saw him in spirit, they saw him as coming in the future;<sup>4</sup> but they weren't here to see him actually present. In fact, the Lord himself says about them to his disciples, that

*many prophets and just men have wished to see what you see, and have not seen it; and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it (Mt 13:17). Wasn't it he that was sending them? But they all had the desire, if it were possible, to see Christ here in the flesh. But because they went ahead of him in death, just as they went ahead of him in birth, Christ didn't find them here, but still Christ did redeem them for eternal life.*

And as an indication of what sort of desire they all had to see the Christ here, call to mind that old man Simeon, whom the Holy Spirit had told as no small favor that he would not depart from this world until he had seen the Christ. Christ was born. He recognized him in the infant in his mother's arms, he took him, held him in his own arms, though he was himself being sustained by the infant's divinity; and holding in his arms the infant, unspeaking Word, he blessed God, saying, *Now, Lord, you are letting your servant go in peace, since my eyes have seen your salvation (Lk 2:29-30).*

*Among those born of women nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist; but the one who is less, is in the kingdom of heaven greater than he is*

3. So the other prophets never saw him; Simeon saw him as an infant; John recognized and greeted him newly conceived, proclaimed and saw him as a young man.<sup>5</sup> So he excelled all the others; listen to the Lord's testimonial about him; he put himself before him, nobody else. He was extraordinarily great, surely, if there was none but Christ who could be put before him. So then, this is what the Lord himself says about him: *Among those born of women, nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist*; and to put himself before him, he went on: *but the one who is less, is in the kingdom of heaven greater than he is (Mt 11:11).*<sup>6</sup> He called himself both less and greater; less by birth, greater by being Lord; less in age, greater in majesty.<sup>7</sup> The Lord, you see, was born after him, but in the flesh, but from the virgin; before him, however, he *was in the beginning the Word (Jn 1:1)*. An extraordinary situation; Christ came after John, and yet John came through Christ. *All things, after all, were made through him, and without him was made nothing (Jn 1:3).*

So why did John come? To show the way of humility, so that human pretensions might diminish, the glory of God increase. So John came, a great one recommending a great one. John came as *the measure of a man (Rev 21:17)*. What does that mean, the measure of a man? No human being could be more than John; whatever was more than John, must thereby be more than human. If the measure of human greatness had reached its limits in John, you wouldn't now find any man greater; and yet you have found someone greater. Confess that he's God, whom naturally you have been able to find greater than man. John was a man, and Christ was a man; but John only a man, Christ God and man. Insofar as he's God, he made John; insofar as he's man, he was born after John.

*John came to teach the proud humility, to proclaim  
the way of repentance*

4. And yet, just notice how this forerunner of his Lord, of one who is God and man, how much he humbles himself. This man, than whom nobody has arisen greater among those born of women, is asked whether he is himself the Christ. He was so great that people could make that mistake; they wondered whether he was himself the Christ; and they wondered about it seriously enough to ask him. Now if he had been a son of pride, not a teacher of humility, he would have hooked himself onto the mistake people were making, and not so much acted to make them think that, as accepted what they were already thinking. Would it perhaps have been overreaching himself, to wish to persuade people that he was the Christ? If he had tried to persuade people, and hadn't been believed, he would have been rejected and dejected, both despised among men and condemned with God. But he had no need to persuade people, he could already see they were thinking this about him; he could accept their mistake, and boost his own prestige.

But far be it from the faithful friend of the bridegroom to wish to be loved himself by the bride in place of the bridegroom. He confessed that he was not what in fact he was not, in order not to lose what he was. John wasn't that bridegroom; because when he was questioned about it, this is what he said: *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom stands and listens to him, and rejoices with joy because of the bridegroom's voice* (Jn 3:29). *I indeed am baptizing you in water for repentance; but the one who is coming after me is greater than I am. How much greater? And I am not worthy to undo the strap of his sandal* (Jn 1:26). Consider how inferior to him he would have been, even if he had been worthy; how much he would have been debasing himself if this is what he had said: "He is greater than I am, and I am only worthy to undo the strap of his sandal"; he would have been calling himself worthy to stoop down to his feet. But now as it is, how exalted he proclaimed him to be, when he declared himself unworthy even to touch his feet, or rather his sandals! So John came to teach the proud humility, to proclaim the way of repentance.

*The voice came before the Word*

5. The voice came before the Word. How can the voice be before the Word? After all, what's said about Christ? *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; this was in the beginning with God* (Jn 1:1-2). But in order to come to us, *the Word became flesh* (Jn 1:14), in order to dwell among us. So we've heard that Christ is the Word; let us hear that John is the voice. When he was asked, *You then, who are you?* he answered, *I am the voice of one crying in the desert* (Jn 1:22-23). So if Christ is the Word, John the voice, John was taken over as the voice in order that the Word might be spoken to us; and that the Word might come to us, the voice preceded it. That's why it's both true that Christ was before John in eternity, and that all the same, he had not to be born first, unless John came to us before the Word as the voice.

So there is going to be a time when we shall see the Word as he is seen by the angels; now, however, let us make progress in the Word, so that we may remain with him for ever.<sup>8</sup>

*He must grow, I must diminish*

6. But *he must grow, I must diminish* (Jn 3:30). This was apparent even from the very births of the Word and of the voice. The Word was born on 25 December,<sup>9</sup> from which point the day begins to increase; the voice was born before the Word of God, when the day begins to diminish. *He must grow*, he said, *I, however, must diminish*. And their deaths also showed this. John was diminished by having his head cut off; Christ grew, by being raised up on the cross. And so, brothers and sisters, let us celebrate the birthday of the voice in honor of the Word; *not in drunkenness and revelry* (Rom 13:13), as the apostle says, but *everything whatsoever you do, do it in the name of God* (Col 3:17), *and the God of peace will be with you* (Phil 4:9).

### NOTES

1. None of the authorities will hazard a guess about the date. It is clear from the opening section that it was not preached in Hippo Regius itself, but in a place where Augustine found himself by accident; it looks as if he was on a journey, and for reasons beyond his control had to make a diversion and change his route. It is not exactly Augustine at his best, or most at his ease with his congregation. Possibly he was taken mildly ill on a journey, and had to stop over for a few days in a place where there was only a small rural congregation.

2. See Lk 1:41 and 1:76.

3. So the text published in Migne's supplement to the Maurist edition, PL 46,991 (henceforward, "Migne"); a more recently published text omits the last phrase. So it gives the sense, "he was speaking in them, though he came after them."

4. See Jn 8:56.

5. Here Migne adds what most likely started as a marginal comment: "pointed him out with his finger, and said, *Behold the lamb of God, behold the one who takes away the sins of the world*" (Jn 1:29). This would later find its way into the text.

6. It is evident from his treatment of the same text in Sermon 293D,1, that he punctuates it in this very idiosyncratic way: "but the one who is less, is in the kingdom of heaven greater than he is." In no other way could this text be applied personally to Christ.

7. Which amounts to saying, more obviously in Latin than in English, "greater in greatness"; *major in majestate*.

8. He just gives up on the task of explaining the question he set himself at the beginning of this section. I think he must have noticed the congregation's attention wandering; otherwise he would have launched into his usual explanation about the word being first in the mind of the speaker, the voice first in the hearing of the listener.

9. He says, "on the 8 of the Kalends of January."



## SERMON 293B

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

Date: 401<sup>1</sup>

*Christ's testimonial to his forerunner was discussed  
in a sermon in the morning*

1. We are celebrating the birthday of a great man today; and do you want to know how great? *Nobody, says scripture, has arisen greater among those born of women* (Mt 11:11). It was the one born of a virgin who said this about him.<sup>2</sup> This was the witness he bore to his own witness; this was the judgment given by the judge on his own herald; this was the way in which the Word wished to honor his voice, as you know, and as you also heard today in this morning's sermon.<sup>3</sup>

*The voice ceases, once it has conveyed the word  
to the ears and to the heart*

2. Christ is the Word, John the voice, since it is written about Christ, *In the beginning was the Word* (Jn 1:1). But when John was speaking about himself, *I am the voice*, he said, *of one crying in the desert* (Jn 1:23). A word belongs to the mind, a voice to the ear. When a voice strikes the ear, and doesn't conduct a word to the mind, it makes an empty sound, but has no useful effect. But for a word to be born in my mind, it doesn't need a voice; for what has already been born in my heart, though, to be carried over to your heart, it employs the services of the voice. So a word can precede a voice, but it cannot proceed without a voice. This is what the voice is fashioned for; not to beget a word that was not in existence, but to enable a word to be revealed, that already existed and was concealed.<sup>4</sup>

So let's see how what we've said about a word and a voice applies to Christ and John. Look for Christ; *In the beginning was the Word*. Where was it? *And the Word was with God* (Jn 1:1). In the beginning with God. How very much before us! How very much above us! *And the Word became flesh, to dwell amongst us* (Jn 1:14). And how would we know this, if we hadn't heard the voice? Christ, after all, was going about among people already clothed in mortal

flesh, and yet people were going to John and saying to him, “You are the Christ,”<sup>5</sup> He, however, to prove that he was a voice, brought to their attention the Word which had preceded him; he turned down an honor that was not his due, he pointed at Christ with his finger. To the people, you see, who said “You are the Christ,” John replied, “*Behold the lamb of God, behold the one who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). Listen to him, acknowledge him; I am going ahead of him, I am announcing him.*”

Remember what he had said: *I am the voice of one crying in the desert, Prepare a way for the Lord (Jn 1:23)*; not for me, but for the Lord. When I cry, you see, I am announcing him, because the voice of the herald means the arrival of the judge. But when the one whom I am announcing comes, and lodges in your hearts, *he must grow, I, however, must diminish (Jn 3:30)*. You know, after all [They said, We know]<sup>6</sup>—how when the word has commandeered the aid of the voice and wound its way into the region of the heart through the paths of the ears, that word grows in the heart, while the voice falls away in the ear. The sound, after all, which struck the ear, doesn’t continue,<sup>7</sup> because the word it conveyed has gone down into the mind. Why is this? Because *he must grow, I, however, must diminish*.

*How Christ grew, and John diminished*

3. John baptizes, Christ also baptizes. John was told, *The one upon whom you see the Spirit coming down like a dove, and abiding on him, he it is who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:33) and fire.*<sup>8</sup> You know about this, brothers and sisters, it happened when Christ was baptized; and lo and behold, now in the whole wide world it is he who baptizes. The baptism of Christ has grown everywhere; the baptism of John, though, while it has its significance as we recall the past, has for all that no service to offer as we celebrate the present; which is why he also says, *He must grow, I, however, must diminish (Jn 3:30)*. We find this necessity illustrated in the births of them both, and in their deaths. While it’s true, you see, that John said about John—that is John the evangelist about John the Baptist—although he said about him, *There was a man sent by God, whose name was John; this man came as a witness, to bear witness about the light (Jn 1:6-7)*; while it’s true he came on the scene to bear witness about the light; still he was born today, brothers and sisters, when the night starts growing, and the day diminishing. Christ, on the other hand, was born at the winter solstice, as you know, when the losses of the night begin to be transferred to the profit of the day; because *we were once darkness, but now light in the Lord (Eph 5:8)*.

Why were they born like that? Because that one must grow, this one, however, must diminish. In their deaths too, John is beheaded with a sword, Christ exalted on the cross; the latter is lifted up, the former laid low; this one is diminished by having his head cut off, that one grows by being stretched out. That one must grow, this one, however, must diminish.<sup>9</sup> It is not without significance, in my opinion, that the ages of their parents were also chosen; an

elderly woman, you see, gives birth to John, a youthful virgin to Christ; barrenness without hope in the first case,<sup>10</sup> untouched virginity in the second; finally, a growing young woman to the one, a fading old lady to the other.

*Both of them announced by the angel*

4. What, though, must he be like, my brothers and sisters, how great must be the worth of this man, seeing that an angel announced his forthcoming birth to his parents, just as he did with the Lord Christ? Why did he have this privilege? Because *nobody has arisen greater among those born of women* (Mt 11:11). As you know of course, the angel Gabriel is sent to Zachary the priest, Gabriel is sent to the virgin Mary; he promises each of them a son, he receives a response from each. Zachary answered the angel promising him a son, *How can I be sure? For I am an old man, and my wife barren, and advanced in her days* (Lk 1:18). Mary also answered, *How will this come about, since I do not know a man?* (Lk 1:34). Both are without hope from the law of nature; they still didn't know, in my opinion, that the law of nature gives way when the gift of God's grace comes along. So both reply out of doubt or hesitation; and yet he is punished, she is blessed. He is told, *Behold, you will be dumb* (Lk 1:20); she is told, *Blessed are you among women* (Lk 1:28).<sup>11</sup> Zachary loses his voice, Mary conceives the Word.

After this, though, what next?<sup>12</sup> The Word becomes flesh in the virgin, and the voice is born to the dumb man. John at his birth restores his father's voice; the father speaks and gives his son a name.<sup>13</sup> Everyone is astonished, everyone thunderstruck, and they all exchange whispers with each other,<sup>14</sup> and say to one another, *What, do you think, this boy will be?* Now let's carry on speaking from the gospel: *And indeed the hand of the Lord was with him* (Lk 1:66). What do you think he will be, seeing he has begun like this? He is still so small, and already so great. And if this one, who has just now begun to be, will be great, what will the one be who always was? The one whom John, still enclosed in the privacy of his mother's womb, greeted while he too was also hidden in the bridal chamber<sup>15</sup> of the virgin's womb, and greeted by his movements, because he couldn't yet do so with his voice; so what will that one be? Do you want to know what he will be? I will put it briefly; listen to the prophet: *He will be called, he says, Lord of the whole earth* (Is 54:5).

*Against superstitious midsummer rituals*

5. So then, as we celebrate with our festive gatherings the birthday of this great man, the Lord's forerunner, the blessed John, let us ask for the help of his prayers. Because he is the friend of the bridegroom, you see, he can also obtain for us that we can belong to the bridegroom, that we may be thought worthy to obtain his grace. But if we wish to obtain his grace, let us not offer an insult to his birthday.<sup>16</sup> Let there be an end to the survivals of sacrilegious rites, an end to vain concerns and silly games. Let the things that are customarily done be

done no more; they may not be done any longer in honor of the demons, but all the same they are still being done according to the custom of the demons.<sup>17</sup> Yesterday, after evening prayers, the whole city was ablaze with stinking flames; the smoke of them covered the whole sky. If you are indifferent to the religion involved, at least think about the damage to the common good. We know, brothers and sisters, these things are done by children; but adults ought to have forbidden them. Someone says, you see, “If you don’t forbid a sin when you can, you are commanding it.”<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, brothers and sisters, the Church is making progress in the name of the Lord year by year. These things are diminishing, and of course all diminishment tends toward nothingness. But they haven’t yet been totally done away with, so that we can keep quiet about them without a qualm. Nor shall we be able to keep quiet about them until the old and the new have come to the ends due to them both; until the old superstition has been totally abolished, and the new religion brought to completion: through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is honor and glory with God the Father almighty, and with the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.<sup>19</sup>

### NOTES

1. This date is fairly certain. In the opening section he refers to another sermon preached in the morning, and this refers in all probability to Sermon 288; see note 3 below. So this sermon too was preached in Carthage. Thus Fischer, Kunzelmann and Perler.

2. Here Augustine accepts the distinction apparently made in Latin usage between “woman” and “virgin,” which elsewhere he is at pains to explain away—that is, to explain that it did not necessarily apply in other languages, especially not in Hebrew.

3. Sermon 288, most probably.

4. Migne (PL 46, 994) reads, “not to beget a word that it knew, but to send forth one that already was.” “A word that it knew,” *verbum quod noverat*, would be an easy misreading of *verbum quod non erat*.

5. See Jn 1:19-20.

6. Migne adds this note of the stenographer, which has every mark of being authentic.

7. There is a phrase added here that it is almost impossible to make sense of. In Migne’s text it runs, *quia non permanet infinitus*, because it (the sound) does not remain infinite; that at least makes grammatical sense, even if it cannot be said to mean anything. But the text of the more modern edition in *Miscellanea Agostiniana* runs, *quam permaneat infinitus*, which is grammatically inconstruable, and thus untranslatable. Neither text includes “the word it conveyed” in the next clause. I am presupposing a reading, *quia verbum descendit in mentem*.

8. The quotation from John has had “and fire” added to it from Mt 3:11, Lk 3:16; though it has been transferred from there to John in a few Greek and Coptic manuscripts of the New Testament. Possibly also in some of Augustine’s New Testament texts; but more likely from his own memory mix.

9. From “that one grows,” Migne’s text runs, “that one, however, grows by being exalted on the gallows of the cross. But these are two, Lord and servant; the Lord on the gallows of the cross, for the servant death by beheading; which is why we also say that that one must grow, this one, however, diminish.”

10. From "a youthful virgin" Migne's text reads instead, "a virgin to Christ. He was being carried in the virgin's womb, and adored in heaven by angels. Barrenness without hope produced this one. . . ."

11. According to the Latin text. In the most authentic text it would only be Elizabeth who uttered this blessing, Lk 1:42. In any case, even if it was also Gabriel in Lk 1:28, he uttered it before delivering his message, not after Mary had asked her question.

12. So Migne's text. The most recently edited text omits "though, what next?" and runs, "After this the Word. . . ."

13. Not quite accurate; the father, still dumb, signals for writing materials, and writes, *His name is John*, Lk 1:65; and only then is his tongue loosened, and does he burst into the *Benedictus*—in which John is addressed, but not actually named.

14. *Et inter se murmura alterna miscentes*; it sounds like an echo, if not a strict quotation, from one of the classical poets. But I cannot trace it; from the rhythm, it wasn't Virgil; possibly Horace.

15. Because it is where the marriage of the divine and the human is taking place, in the mystery of the incarnation.

16. So does "his grace" mean John's grace? Clearly not in the ordinary understanding of such a phrase, as though John were the source of the grace. But in the sense that John's grace is the grace of being the friend of the bridegroom, and that that is the grace we are asking him to obtain for us too, yes, it does mean John's grace.

17. The pagan gods. Presumably the sun god, Apollo, or more likely his popular substitute, Hercules, had been the chief focus of pious pagan rituals.

18. Seneca, in *Troades*, 291.

19. From "nor shall we be able" to the end Migne's text has a slightly different and longer conclusion. Perhaps one may infer from these variations that there were at least two stenographers taking down this sermon, and that they did not compare and conflate their versions; perhaps one was more affected by the "midsummer madness" than the other!

## SERMON 293C

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

Date: 420<sup>1</sup>

*John, the voice, at the service of Christ, the Word*

1. Throughout the Church of Christ, spread far and wide in the world, the birthday is being celebrated today of John the Baptist, friend of the bridegroom and forerunner of the Lord. I owe a sermon for this solemn occasion, you also owe your attention, we all owe our devotion. *Among those born of women, you see, nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11); the only one who has taken precedence over him is the one through whom he was created. A wonderful thing happened, indeed, that he should precede in his birth the one without whose provision he could not have been born at all.

Rightly is he the voice, the other the Word; he said himself, *I am the voice of one crying in the desert* (Jn 1:23), while of the other it is said, *In the beginning was the Word* (Jn 1:1). Something of a similar kind occurs in our very, very different utterances; a word is born first in the mind, by which the speaker's voice is formed; the voice is uttered by the mouth, and by it the word is made known to the hearers. Thus Christ, through whom John like all things was created, remained in the Father; John, through whom Christ was made known to all, proceeded from his mother. The former in the beginning was the Word before the world, the latter at the end was the voice before the Word. A word is uttered after understanding, a voice after silence; thus Mary believed in giving birth to Christ; Zachary, about to beget John, was struck dumb.

Finally, Christ was born of a young woman in her prime, John of an old woman in her declining years; that's like the word bearing fruit in the heart of the thinker, the voice being swallowed up in the ears of the hearer. Here's something else too that the words, *he must grow, I, however, must diminish* (Jn 3:30), may be referred to: every prediction put out in the law and the prophets before Christ, like a voice before a word, continued until John,<sup>2</sup> in whom at last<sup>3</sup> all figures came to an end; after that the grace of the gospel, and the open preaching of the kingdom of heaven which will have no end, bears fruit and grows in the whole wide world.

*How Christ grew, and John diminished*

2. This is also indicated by the births, and again by the deaths, of John and Christ. John, of course, was born when the day begins to diminish, Christ when the day begins to grow. John's diminishing hinted at the cutting off of his head, Christ's growing pointed to his being lifted up on the cross. Then again, there is another somewhat more abstruse understanding, which the Lord opens up to those who knock, of what might be meant by what John said about Christ: *He must grow, I, however, must diminish* (Jn 3:30). Whatever human righteousness amounts to, as far as any person may make progress in it, it was certainly complete and perfect in John, seeing that Truth said about him, *Among those born of women, nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11). So there can be no human being more completely just than this man; but this man is only a human being. Christ, though, is divine as well as human. Now because the aspect of Christian grace that is first and foremost impressed upon us, and learned by us, is that nobody should make their boast in man, but *whoever boasts, let him boast in the Lord* (2 Cor 10:17), man about God, the servant about the Lord; *he must grow*, he said, *I, however, must diminish*.

God, indeed, neither diminishes nor increases in himself; but in us human beings, to the extent that we make more and more progress in true piety, divine grace grows, human power diminishes; until the temple of God, which is found in all the members of Christ, is brought to such a pitch of perfection, that *every principality and authority and power has been put down, and God is everything in everyone* (1 Cor 15:24.28). That other John, the evangelist, says, *That was the true light which enlightens every man coming into this world* (Jn 1:9); this John, the Baptist, says, *We have all received from his fullness* (Jn 1:16). So when the light, which remains complete in itself, increases all the same in the one who is being enlightened, he naturally diminishes in himself, since that in him which was without God is being eliminated. I mean, the only thing man can do without God is sin; so human power diminishes here, when that destroyer of sins, divine grace, prevails. The creature's weakness gives way to the creator's strength, and the pride of a private, individualistic love falls away into a public charity and concern, as John cries out in our misery about Christ's mercy, *He must grow, I, however, must diminish*.

## NOTES

1. This is purely and simply a guess of mine. No date or place is suggested by the scholars. It strikes me, however, very much as a sermon of Augustine in his later years, and on his home ground of Hippo Regius. The concluding reflections about grace and merely human powers suggest a latish date. However the year 420 is not suggested with any precision; it means "round about 420."

2. See Lk 16:16.

3. Reading *ultime* instead of the text's *ultimae*, so that the whole phrase now runs *in quo ultime figurae cessaverunt*. With the text's reading, it would mean, "in whom the last figures came to an end."



## SERMON 293D

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

Date: 417<sup>1</sup>

*What the Lord and John the Baptist say about each other*

1. About John the Baptist, not the evangelist, whose birthday we are celebrating today, a great day, the Lord himself has a great testimonial to give. Our savior, you see, says about him, his Lord and ours—what else can he say about him but the truth? *Among those born of women nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist.* There you are; that's the one in whose honor this feast is being celebrated; one than whom nobody has arisen greater among those born of women. But the Lord himself added something, to say, *But the one who is less, in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is* (Mt 11:11). What's "less than he"? Less in age, greater in authority. John the greatest of men, but still a man; about the Lord Christ, however, it's certainly not enough to call him the greatest of men, because he is both God and man.

We've quoted the Lord's testimonial about John, let's quote John's testimonial about the Lord. Keep in mind, though, hold onto the Lord's testimonial to John, which I've reminded you of, that *among those born of women nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist.* There you have what Jesus says about John; what does John say about Jesus? First of all, notice how the Lord's testimonial about John was fulfilled. He was himself thought to be the Christ; and you heard the account and the reminder, when the first reading was chanted from the Acts of the Apostles, how John said, *What are you suspecting me to be? I am not the Christ* (Acts 13:25). Human error suspected something more of him, but humility confessed what he really was. And notice how easy it would have been for him to abuse human error, and flaunt himself as the Christ. He didn't do it; he's rightly called great, made much more effective by confessing than he ever would be by proud braying and bragging.

Would he have had to persuade them that he was the Christ? They already thought so. He would just be confirming what they thought, deceiving them about what he really was, by calling himself what he was not. And if he had done that, where would he have been? *You sent to John*, the Lord Jesus said to the Jews; *he was a burning and shining lamp, and you were yourselves willing*

for a time to exult in his light; I, however, have a testimony greater than John (Jn 5:33-36). A good lamp; how right he was to take refuge at the foot of the rock, in order not to be blown out by the wind of pride.

*Why John was not one of Christ's disciples*

2. So just notice, dearly beloved, the unique greatness of John, and how what the Lord said about him was fulfilled: *Among those born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11). Certainly Christ was the Lord, or rather he is the Lord, who was before John, was before Abraham, was before Adam, was before heaven and earth, because *all things were made through him* (Jn 1:3); certainly he was the Lord, and as God he was walking about on earth, and as the Word he had become flesh.<sup>2</sup> And yet John was not numbered among his disciples. Run through the names of the disciples from the first to the last; there's a John there, but that's the evangelist, not the Baptist. So this man, as far as human appearances went, was not one of Christ's disciples; instead, he was gathering his own disciples himself at the time of Christ. In fact, the Jews were using John's disciples to insult Christ's disciples with, and finding fault with them, when they said, *Why do John's disciples fast, and your disciples do not fast?* (Mk 2:18).

Christ had disciples, John also had them; John was baptizing, Christ also was baptizing.<sup>3</sup> *Among those born of women* it's true that *nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist*; but all the same, there he is, gathering disciples like a rival, apparently against Christ, but in fact for Christ. Just because he was so great that he could be thought to be the Christ, he himself had to bear witness to Christ. The one to whom the supreme man bears witness must be more than man. "I am not what you think. Certainly, I am great, which is why you think this; but I am not what you think."

*And who are you?* he was asked.

*I am the voice of one crying in the desert, Prepare a way for the Lord* (Jn 1:22-23). Observe the forerunner, receive the track master,<sup>4</sup> fear the judge. *Prepare a way for the Lord, make straight his paths. Every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and every valley shall be exalted; and the crooked places shall become straight, and the rough ones smooth ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God* (Is 40:3-5); not me, but the salvation of God. *All flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

The lamp is bearing witness to the day,<sup>5</sup> because Christ is the day. What's John? The lamp. But what need was there for a lamp? Because the day was being hidden; it was being hidden, until the time for it to be manifested; because it never would be manifested, unless it were first hidden. *For if they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory* (1 Cor 2:8).

*Another way of taking Mt 11:11; still, though,  
not the commonly accepted way*

3. And yet, to stop them going on resisting the day too long, the Jews are put to confusion over the lamp.<sup>6</sup> They are sent to John; he said, *I am not he; there is in the midst of you one who is greater than me* (Jn 1:21.26.15). How much greater? Certainly, the Lord Christ had said, *Among those born of women nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist; but the one who is less—speaking of himself, in that he came after him in the flesh—in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is* (Mt 11:11). He said he was less; how much greater he was, he didn't say.

Well, in case I should appear to be depriving you of anything, seeing that it too is a useful meaning, and doesn't depart from the truth, I will also tell you about it. In these words, where the Lord said, *Among those born of women nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist; but the one who is less in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is*, there is another way of taking it, with another way of punctuating the words. If you punctuate like this: *Among those born of women nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist; but the one who is less in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he is*, understanding the holy angels to be in the kingdom of heaven; then it's saying that the one who is least among the holy angels is greater than all human beings. Whether this is the meaning, or that other one, neither is abhorrent to the faith; because that is certainly true, that Christ was less than John in age, greater in divine majesty; and this is true, that however great a human being may be, he is less than the least of the angels.

However, let's listen to John, and how much greater he confessed the Lord Jesus to be. Because he said himself, *The one who is coming after me, is greater than me* (Jn 1:15); you hear "greater than me," you ask how much greater. If he keeps quiet about it, we may guess, but certainly we must believe; John after all is the servant, Christ is the Lord. Let John tell us how much: *the strap of whose sandal*, he says, *I am not worthy to undo* (Jn 1:27). How much he would have been humbling himself, if he had said he was worthy!

If he's standing, or he's sitting, and you are undoing the strap of his sandal, I recognize the position: he's the Lord, you the servant.

"That's not the half of it," says John; "I am not worthy even for that."

So answer us, if it's at all possible, why you are not among his disciples, why you gathered disciples of your own apart from him.

"I," says John, "I am not his disciple; well, I am, but not where you can see it. *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom.*" It's John's voice about the Lord Christ: *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom is standing, and listening to him* (Jn 3:29).

Sure, he's not a disciple; he's his servant as he stands; his friend, by his gracious leave. Jesus, after all, said to his own disciples, *I will no longer call you servants, but friends* (Jn 15:15). Notice, all the same, that he is a disciple inwardly, in secret, in the hidden place of the sanctuary. *The friend of the bridegroom is standing and listening to him.* Let him stand and listen to him;

because unless he had listened, he would have fallen, and been like the one of whom the Lord himself says, *He was a murderer from the beginning, and did not stand in the truth* (Jn 8:44). The devil did not stand in the truth, and falling how he fell, the one who cast down others! John, however, did stand, and listened to him. And what follows? *And with joy he rejoices on account of the bridegroom's voice* (Jn 3:29).

"He's the Word, I'm the voice," says John.<sup>7</sup> He's the voice, and *with joy he rejoices on account of the bridegroom's voice*. Yes, you are the voice, he the Word; but he is both Word and voice. Why is the Lord both Word and voice? Because *the Word became flesh* (Jn 1:14). Just as the word, you see, which our hearts give birth to is in our hearts, and is hidden from those who are outside us; just as now what I am about to say is hidden from you, but not hidden from me; it's already a word in my heart; but in order for it to proceed to you, a voice is commandeered, and what was hidden in me reaches you; nor, when it reaches you, does it depart from me. If that's how it is with my word, what about the Word of God? The one who was with the Father was hidden with the Father; in order for him to come out to us, flesh was commandeered, like a voice; and he proceeded to us, and did not depart from the Father. And the Jews heard him saying this, that is, John saying this: *All of us have received from his fullness* (Jn 1:16). What is *All of us*? There was a patriarch, there was a prophet, there was any just man, any preacher you like, there was John himself, than whom *nobody has arisen greater among those born of women*; they all drank from that spring; that's why they all gushed forth such good things.

*The Jews put to confusion over John, the lamp, as foretold in the psalm*

4. So the Jews, so hostile to the hidden day, are put to confusion over the lamp. And indeed, put to confusion they were. Notice how they questioned the Lord himself one day, and said, *How long are you going on taking our souls? If you are the Christ, tell us openly* (Jn 10:24). They were laying the groundwork for a false accusation, not seeking the truth. *How long*, they say, *are you going on taking our souls?* How long are you going on keeping us in suspense? *If you are the Christ, tell us openly*. And he said to them, *I too will ask you about one matter: tell me, John's baptism, where is it from? Is it from heaven, or from men?* (Lk 20:3-4).<sup>8</sup> Wisdom flashed forth, imprudence was checked; they returned to themselves, having come out against him. Having come out armed with a false accusation, they returned in doubt and hesitation; and they said to one another, or to themselves, *If we say, From heaven, he will answer us, Why did you not believe him*, when he bore witness to me? If you believed him, why are you questioning me? *If we say, From heaven—this to themselves<sup>9</sup>—he will answer us, Why did you not believe him? If we say, From men, we are afraid of the crowds, that they may stone us. For the whole crowd of the Jews regarded John as a prophet* (Mt 21:25-26).

That's why, seeing by the light of the lamp before the day, that whichever answer they gave, they would be answering against themselves, they answered,

*We do not know.* They answered what they did know: *We do not know.* And the Lord: *Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things* (Mt 21:27). What were they to say? What answer could they give? Most certainly they were put to confusion, and the prophecy was fulfilled of the one who says in the psalm, *I have prepared a lamp for my Christ.* Notice when it was said, when it was fulfilled. As for when it was said, read the psalm; as for when it was fulfilled, read the gospel. *I have prepared a lamp for my Christ.* To what end? *His enemies I will clothe with confusion* (Ps 132:17-18). What a hard and obstinate confusion! Every day they are put to confusion, and are not converted.

*Let us imitate John, and attribute whatever good there is in us to God, whatever evil to ourselves*

5. As for us, though, dearly beloved, who have been grafted into the place of the branches that were cut off—that, you see, is what the apostle says<sup>10</sup>—let us listen to this same apostle and *not be high minded* (Rom 11:20); whatever we are that's good, let us attribute it to the good God; whatever we are that's bad, let us put it down to ourselves. You have *an upright heart* (Ps 73:1), if in the good things that come your way you praise none but God, and in the bad things that come your way you don't blame or curse God. Whatever God does with us, after all, he does knowingly; nobody is better than he is, nobody wiser, nobody more powerful. He has called us all together here—and just recollect where from; he has set us free from idols, liberated us from slavery to demons and from such dreadful sacrilegious rites. Whence this to us?

*Whence this to me*, she said, *that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* (Lk 1:43). Simply as human beings let us humble ourselves, and not boast except in the Lord, that he may be exalted; let us, in ourselves, diminish, so that in him we may grow. Consider that greatest of men, than whom among those born of women nobody has arisen greater; what did he say about Christ? *He must grow, I, however, must diminish* (Jn 3:30). Let God grow, man diminish. And how can the one who is perfect grow? I mean, what is lacking to God, that he should grow? God grows in you, when you understand him. So take note of the lowliness of man, and the exalted highness of God. *He must grow*, he said, *I, however, must diminish.*

The birthdays of them both were an indication of this. The thing is being stated in light, the sun itself is the witness. From today the days diminish, from the Lord's birthday the days grow longer. *He must grow, I, however, must diminish.* The Lord Jesus Christ, you see, the author and helmsman of creation, the ruler of the world, the fashioner of the stars, the controller of the times, was born when he wished to be, and so chose a day for himself to be born on, which would effectively signify who he was; and he himself also gave a day to his forerunner. In him he wished man to be understood, in himself God. Let man diminish, God grow. This is also indicated by their deaths; John was beheaded, Christ lifted up on the cross. So, brothers and sisters, let me conclude briefly on this note. There are many things, after all, which can be said about Saint John

the Baptist; but I am not up to saying them all, nor are you up to hearing them. So now let me conclude briefly: let man humble himself, God be exalted. *Whoever boasts, let him boast in the Lord* (2 Cor 10:17).

### NOTES

1. Another pure guess on my part. The sermon rambles rather, from half-finished point to half-started point; the preacher is evidently rather tired. The emphasis on grace suggests the Pelagian period in Augustine's life. There is no reason to suppose that the sermon was preached anywhere else but Hippo Regius.

2. See Jn 1:14.

3. See Jn 3:22; 4:2.

4. *Metatorem*, the one who measures out the course. But it could perhaps mean in the popular Latin of Augustine's time the one who watches at the *meta*, the equivalent of the finishing line in modern track events. It is not clear whether he is here referring to Christ, whom of course he goes on to call the judge (in athletic terms; the referee or umpire), or to John, who as forerunner may be thought of as having measured out the course, tested it out. My guess is that he is thinking of Christ, and that the term is really equivalent to judge.

5. By calling him the salvation of God.

6. Not really until the beginning of section 4.

7. See Jn 1:23.

8. Jesus actually asked this question, of course, when they were asking him by what authority he drove the money changers and others out of the temple.

9. This phrase, *hoc apud se*, is entirely redundant here, and should probably be omitted. It can be kept in as a kind of aside, as I translate it. What is quite impossible is to treat it as the object of "he will answer us," which is what the punctuation of the Latin text does.

10. See Rom 11:17-24.

## SERMON 293E

### ON THE TWO MEN, CHRIST AND JOHN

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

*How Christ is greater than John*

1. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* Did he grant to each of them<sup>2</sup> that this should be said about him: *all things were made through him* (Jn 1:1.3)? He kept divinity to himself, granted grace to us. Let us acknowledge him as man for us, as God above us; the same one both man and God. But you can see they are both men, both John and Christ; but the one you can see as man is greater than John . . .;<sup>3</sup> and yet, *he is not worthy to undo the strap of his sandal* (Jn 1:27). So understand Christ to be the greater; and so much the greater, that John is less than him, although he is greater than all the just.

Christ, though, is greater than earth and heaven; greater than the angels, greater than all *the Powers*, greater than all *Thrones, Authorities, Dominions* (Col 1:16). In what way greater? Because *all things were made through him, and without him was made nothing* (Jn 1:3). In this respect he is equal to the Father, as man less than the Father. It's the same one, after all, who said, *I and the Father are one* (Jn 10:30), as said, *The Father is greater than I* (Jn 14:28). Two statements that are apparently contradictory, and both are true; don't let your thoughts pick a quarrel, and the words of the Lord won't quarrel. *I and the Father are one* shows his equality; *The Father is greater than I* shows his inequality.<sup>4</sup>

*The full meaning of the Son's equality with the Father*

2. Where *I and the Father are one*; listen to the apostle explaining both statements in one place. *Who, since he was in the form of God, did not think it robbery for himself to be equal to God* (Phil 2:6), because he was born so. It's robbery when something is grabbed unlawfully, as with Adam; those things came his way by robbery; and that's why, since he wanted to grab at what he was not,<sup>5</sup> he lost what he had. How did he wish to commit robbery? The serpent said to him what had brought about his own downfall: *I will set my throne in*

*the north, and I will be like the most High (Is 14:13-14). This suggestion of the devil's made man a partner in his pride.<sup>6</sup> He was jealous of him still standing, because he himself had already fallen; he threw him down by the very means that had been his own downfall. There you have those for whom it certainly was robbery.*

But it wasn't so for him, because he was born equal,<sup>7</sup> and abiding from eternity to eternity, he never was not equal, never will not be equal. Nor should we be saying "was, is, and will be," but just "is." So if you say of a thing that it was, it isn't any longer; if you say of a thing that it will be, it isn't yet. That's why in that place, when he was giving instructions to his servant Moses, and Moses said to him *What are you called?* and *What am I to say to the children of Israel?* he answered, *I am who I am. And so you shall say to the children of Israel, He who is sent me to you (Ex 3:13-14).* When it says "is," it's a true "is," a genuine "is," that can never and nowhere be changed. This is what God is, what the Son of God is, what the Holy Spirit is. And so, brothers and sisters, this above all else is why the Son is equal to the Father; which is why the apostle says, *He did not think it robbery for himself to be equal to God.*

*The way in which he could say "The Father is greater than I"*

3. How about *The Father is greater than I (Jn 14:28)? But he emptied himself*—notice, be aware of the distinction—*taking the form of a servant (Phil 2:7).* Fix it in your ears, and observe how, in referring to the form of a servant, he said *taking*. About the form of God, though, he didn't say *taking*, but said, *Who, since he was in the form of God. So, taking the form of a servant, being made into the likeness of men, and in condition found as a man, he lowered himself, being made obedient unto death, the death indeed of the cross; for which reason also God exalted him, and gave him the name which is above every name (Phil 2:7-9).* Insofar as he was made, he was exalted; exalted insofar as low; because insofar as equal to the Father, he was not exalted, because he was never low.<sup>8</sup> It was insofar as he died that he rose again; that *he gave him the name which is above every name.*

There you have Christ coming into the world, and yet he was already there; he rose again and ascended into heaven, and yet he had never left it. You think of him as a man? Don't think like that.<sup>9</sup> Here's the man;<sup>10</sup> the one than whom *nobody has arisen greater among those born of women (Mt 11:11).* Listen to him on the subject of the other man: *I am not worthy to undo the strap of his sandal (Jn 1:27).* So take it that they are both men; but one man is God, the other is a good man because of God; one man is Truth, the other man with the help of Truth is truthful.



## NOTES

1. This is clearly only the conclusion of a longer sermon, so there is no point in trying to date it. It is hardly about John the Baptist at all; at least that is the case with this fragment, whatever the sermon as a whole may have contained. He is just mentioned at the beginning and the end. The probability is, however, that it was preached on his feast day, 24 June.

2. Reading *unicuique eorum* instead of the text's *unusquisque eorum*: did he grant that each of them [of what? the pronoun is in the masculine gender] would be said about him, *all things were made through him*—which is nonsense. In any case, the sentence clearly presupposes antecedents to its pronouns, thus indicating that the manuscript is defective, and throwing us *in medias res*. The preacher had presumably already introduced the comparison between Christ and John.

3. Here there is evidently something missing from the text. One could guess a clause such as this: although *among those born of women nobody has arisen greater than John the Baptist*.

4. In other words, the two statements continue apparently to contradict each other. He thinly disguises this in the Latin by using the word *imparilitas* for "inequality."

5. Being like, or equal to, God; Gn 3:5. What he had, and now lost, was the grace of innocence, or "original justice." What "those things" were that Adam did get by his robbery is not clear. Presumably the knowledge of good and evil and everything that flows from that, right up to the internal combustion engine, the hydrogen bomb, and Chernobyl.

6. The suggestion in Gn 3:5, *you will be like gods*, echoes the thought in Is 14:14, *I will be like the Most High*, a thought in fact ascribed to the king of Babylon, whom the text, however, equates with Lucifer, Star of the morning—a Babylonian deity possibly seen in myth as a kind of rival to the Sun-god, Marduk.

7. *Natus aequalis*, which is the same as saying *natura aequalis*, equal by nature.

8. "Lowered" and "low" in these sentences translate *humiliavit* and *humilis*. I could not translate by "humbled" and "humble," because while the background thought of the virtue of humility is clearly there as regards Christ's self-emptying, I did not see how I could end by saying, "as equal to the Father he was never humble."

9. This illustrates very well the way Augustine tended, while remaining perfectly orthodox, to "play down" the humanity of Christ, and to use "Christ" as a divine title. He became man for a specific purpose, our salvation, and having achieved that purpose, while still remaining human, he so to say reasserted his divine nature; and it is now that divine nature of Christ that should be the main focus of our thoughts, and the primary object of our hope and love—though not, interestingly enough, of our faith. That is immediately and primarily directed to the Word made flesh, to the flesh indeed of the Word made flesh.

10. *Ecce homo*, the very expression used by Pilate when showing Christ to the people, crowned with thorns, Jn 19:5. Whether Augustine realized this when he used the expression here is, I think, doubtful.

## SERMON 294

PREACHED IN THE BASILICA OF THE ANCESTORS ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE  
MARTYR GUDDENS ON 27 JUNE  
(ON THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS, AGAINST THE PELAGIANS)

*Date: 413<sup>1</sup>*

*Augustine will continue with the question of the baptism of infants,  
broached three days earlier on the feast of John the Baptist*

1. On the birthday of Saint John, among the other things that it seemed necessary to talk about, my sermon was led into the subject of the baptism of babies; and because it had already gone on rather long, and we had to think about bringing it to a close, not as much was said about such an important subject as should have been said by concerned persons when so much was at stake. What causes us concern is not the actual judgment established long ago in the Catholic Church by supreme authority,<sup>2</sup> but the objections of some people, which they are now doing everything they can to spread around, and so to upset the peace of mind of many. So today I have agreed, with the Lord's help, to speak on the topic. We are indeed celebrating the feast of a martyr; but a matter that concerns all the faithful is more important than what only concerns the martyrs. Not all the faithful, after all, are martyrs, while the martyrs are precisely such just because they are faithful. So let us see what is proposed by these people, what is troubling them; because we ought to be thinking of them too, not so much to refute as to heal them.

*The Pelagians agree that babies should be baptized, but not in order  
to be saved, just in order to enter the kingdom of heaven*

2. They grant that babies should be baptized. So what is at issue between us and them is not whether babies are to be baptized; but the question is about the reason, why they are to be baptized. As for what they grant, let us hold it together with them without the slightest hesitation. Let nobody doubt that babies are to be baptized. Let nobody doubt it, seeing that these people don't have any doubts about it either, though in some respects they disagree with us.

But what we say is, that there is no other way for them to obtain salvation

and eternal life, unless they are baptized in Christ;<sup>3</sup> while what they say is, that it is not for the sake of salvation, not for the sake of eternal life, but for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Pay attention, please, for a moment or two, while I explain as best I can what this may mean. A baby, they say, even if it isn't baptized, on the strength of its innocence, in that it has no sin at all, neither its own nor original; neither coming from itself nor derived from Adam; must necessarily have salvation and eternal life, even if it isn't baptized; but it is to be baptized for this reason, in order that it may enter into the kingdom of God, that is into the kingdom of heaven.

If this point has to be discussed, it has to be discussed for their sakes, of course, not for ours. They are, after all, our brothers, deeply troubled by this question; but they ought to let themselves be directed by the helm of authority. You see, when they say they are not to be baptized for the sake of obtaining salvation and eternal life, but only for the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, they are indeed admitting that they should be baptized, but not on account of eternal life, but on account of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>4</sup>

What about eternal life?

They will have it, they say.

Why will they have it?

Because they have no sin, and cannot be subject to damnation.

So is there eternal life outside the kingdom of heaven?

*No middle place between the kingdom of heaven on the right hand, and eternal damnation on the left*

3. This is the first error that needs to be turned away from people's ears, and uprooted from their minds. This is something new in the Church, previously unheard of, that there is eternal life apart from the kingdom of heaven, eternal salvation apart from the kingdom of God. First consider, brother, if you shouldn't perhaps agree with us on this point, that whoever is not consigned to the kingdom of God is undoubtedly consigned to damnation. The Lord is going to come, and pass judgment on the living and the dead, as the gospel says, and to make two groups, on the right hand and on the left. To those on the left he is going to say, Go into the eternal fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41); to those on the right he is going to say, *Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the origin of the world* (Mt 25:34). On this side he mentions the kingdom, on that damnation with the devil. There is no middle place left, where you can put babies.

Judgment will be passed on the living and the dead; some will be on the right, others on the left; I don't know any other destiny. You there, bringing in a middle place, get out of the middle, don't make the person seeking the right hand trip over you. And I'm advising you for your own sake; get out of the middle, but don't go to the left. So if there will be a right hand and a left, and we know of no middle place in the gospel; here on the right hand is the kingdom of heaven:

*Receive*, he says, *the kingdom*. Whoever isn't there, is on the left. What will be happening on the left? *Go into the eternal fire*. On the right to the kingdom, eternal of course; on the left to the eternal fire. Whoever is not on the right, is without a doubt on the left; so whoever is not in the kingdom is without a doubt in the eternal fire.

Can those who are not baptized really have eternal life? They won't be on the right, that is they won't be in the kingdom. Do you count everlasting fire as eternal life? And about eternal life itself, listen to a more explicit statement that the kingdom is nothing else but eternal life. First he mentioned the kingdom, but on the right; eternal fire on the left. In the final sentence, though, to teach us what the kingdom is and what eternal fire is, *Then these*, he says, *will go off into eternal burning, the just, however, into eternal life* (Mt 25:46).

There you are, he has explained to you what the kingdom is, and what eternal fire is; so that when you confess that a baby won't be in the kingdom, you are admitting it will be in the eternal fire. The kingdom of heaven, you see, is eternal life.

*There can be no salvation promised to babies without Christ*

4. Nor did the apostle Paul say anything else, when he was meaning to put the fear of God into people, not into unbaptized babies,<sup>5</sup> but into villains, criminals, defiled and desperate people. He didn't terrify them with the prospect of being in everlasting fire, where they will most certainly go; but he only terrified them with the prospect of not being in the kingdom; so that when they saw that they were losing the hope of the kingdom, they would see that the only consequence of that would be the punishment of eternal fire. *Make no mistake*, he says; *neither fornicators, nor the servants of idols, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, nor those who lie with men, nor thieves, nor misers, nor drunkards, nor cursers, nor grabbers shall possess the kingdom of God* (1 Cor 6:9-10). He didn't say, "These and those, people like that and like that, shall be tormented by eternal fire," but *shall not possess the kingdom of God*. With the right hand denied them, all that remained was the left. But how can they escape the everlasting fire? Only by getting into the kingdom.

He continues, *And that, indeed, is what some of you were. But you have been washed, but you have been sanctified, but you have been justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God* (1 Cor 6:11). In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. *For there is no other name under heaven in which we must be saved* (Acts 4:12); all of us, *the little together with the great* (Ps 115:13). But if we must be saved in this name, clearly there will be no salvation without this name, such as is promised without Christ to babies. If these babies will pardon me for saying so, I don't know whether any who offer them salvation without Christ, can find salvation themselves in Christ.

*How can the Pelagians justify their distinction between the kingdom of heaven and eternal life?*

5. Then we ask them, "What if somebody says that babies, in virtue of their innocence, as you say, and their immunity from all fault, are going to have not only salvation and eternal life, but also the kingdom of God? On what grounds has it been defined as certain by you that babies won't have the kingdom of God without baptism; so that you quite arbitrarily make a distinction where they are concerned, not as helpers of babies, but as oppressors of the wretched; so that you make an arbitrary distinction where they are concerned, and give them salvation and eternal life, apart from the kingdom of heaven? Others, more kindly than you and more merciful, and on your own reckoning more just, will give them the whole thing, both eternal life and the kingdom of heaven. How will you get the better of them?"

"Seeing that you delight in human reasoning over against the most evident authority, produce the rule your reasoning works on, and declare with all the powers at your disposal how these people may be overcome, who in virtue of the innocence of babies, and because they are, as you say, without any fault, that is without any original sin, want to give them, even if not baptized, not only eternal life, but also the kingdom of heaven. These are the people you must overcome." I for my part, without prejudice will take their side for the time being, and say what is not in fact my opinion; but I'm warning you,<sup>6</sup> so that you may see who are our more dangerous opponents.

*The same argument with the Pelagians continues*

6. Here comes heaven knows who, and says, "Babies, which have absolutely no sin at all, neither contracted by their own life, nor derived from the life of the first parent, will have both eternal life and the kingdom of heaven."

Answer him, get the better of this man who opposes you and your different distinction. I mean, what you say is, "These unbaptized babies will indeed have eternal life, but won't have the kingdom of heaven." What he says against you is, "On the contrary, both life and the kingdom of heaven. Why, I mean to say, are you snatching the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven away from the innocent? If they don't acquire the kingdom of heaven, they are being done out of a great good. Where's the justice of it? Tell me, why? How have unbaptized babies offended, since they have no fault at all, neither their own, nor any derived from the first parent? How have they offended, tell me, that they shouldn't enter the kingdom of heaven, that they should be cut off from the lot of the saints, should be exiled from the company of the angels?"

"You regard yourself, you see, as merciful, because you are not taking life away from them; you're damning them, all the same, by cutting them off from the kingdom of heaven. You're condemning them; not putting them to death, no, but sending them into exile. Even exiles, after all, are alive, if they are in good health. They don't suffer any pains of the body, they aren't being tortured, they aren't plunged into the darkness of a dungeon; their sole punishment and

pain is not being in their home country. If they love their home country, it's a great pain and punishment; if they don't love it, it's a worse punishment in the heart. Is it a trifling evil in people's hearts, if they don't seek the company of the saints, don't desire the kingdom of heaven? If they don't desire it, their own perversity is their punishment; while if they do, their punishment is love that has been cheated. But if, as you would have it, it's only a small pain, a small punishment; even a small one is great, if there is no fault. Defend God's justice here; why should even a small punishment be inflicted on the innocent, in whom absolutely no sin at all is to be found?"

Speak against this opponent, who with a mercy and justice greater than yours wishes to give unbaptized babies not only eternal life, but also the kingdom of heaven. Answer if you can, but produce reasons. It's reasons, after all, that you like to boast about.<sup>7</sup>

*Augustine himself cannot produce reasons, but can only exclaim, with Saint Paul, "Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"*

7. I am myself keenly aware of how profoundly problematic this question is, and I recognize that my powers are not sufficient to get to the bottom of it. Here too I like to exclaim with Paul, *Oh the depths of the riches!* (Rom 11:33). Unbaptized babies go to damnation; they are the apostle's words, after all: *From one to condemnation* (Rom 5:16).<sup>8</sup> I cannot find a satisfactory and worthy explanation—because I can't find one, not because there isn't one. So where, in the depths, I cannot find bottom, I must take account of human weakness, not condemn divine authority. I certainly exclaim, and I'm not in the least ashamed of it, *Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments, and untraceable his ways! For who has come to know the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who first gave to him, and will be repaid? Because from him, and through him, and in him are all things; to him be glory for ever and ever* (Rom 11:33-36).

For my part, I fortify my weakness with these words, and covered by this precaution, I can stand up to the arrows of your reasonings with a wall to shield me. But as for you, warlike warrior, that is, mighty reasoner, answer this man who says to you, "Babies, being totally innocent, and immune from all sin, both their own and original, will not only have eternal life, but also the kingdom of heaven. That's only just. Having nothing evil in them, why should there be any good they do not have?"

"But I know," you say.

How do you know?

"Because the Lord said so."

At last you've come to it. So not because you have worked it out, but because the Lord said so. I congratulate you wholeheartedly for that; it's absolutely sound. As a man you haven't found a reason, you take refuge in authority. I approve, I approve entirely. You're doing well; you can't find an answer to give,

so take refuge in authority. I'm not pursuing you there, I'm not driving you out of there; on the contrary, as you flee there I welcome and embrace you.

*"Unless one is born again of water and the Spirit, one will not enter the kingdom of God"*

8. So produce your authority; let us stand on it together against our common enemy; because that unbaptized babies do not enter the kingdom of heaven is what you and I both say. So let us stand up to that common adversary together, who says that unbaptized babies are going to enter the kingdom of heaven, and let us hold up the shield of faith against his most insidious darts. Let the guesswork of human reason give way for a moment or two, let us take up divine weapons. *Take up*, says the apostle, *the armament of God* (Eph 6:13). Come on, let's both together say to this man, "Are you a Christian?"

"Yes, a Christian," he says.

Listen to the gospel, eager as you are to send unbaptized babies into the kingdom of heaven. Listen to the gospel: *Unless one is born again of water and the Spirit, one will not enter the kingdom of God* (Jn 3:5). It's the Lord's judgment; only one who is not a Christian will oppose it.

That's that man driven off; what remains is my contest with you. And perhaps the way you have defeated him for his good will be the way you are defeated for your own good. Because if the one you have defeated is not pigheaded, you have in fact taught him something. So don't be pigheaded yourself; for the time being let us hold on together to this statement: *Unless one is born again of water and the Spirit, one will not enter the kingdom of God.*

"That's why," you say, "I cannot promise unbaptized babies the kingdom of God, against the Lord's express statement. There you have why I say they will not have the kingdom of God. There you have why I say they must be baptized, in order to have the kingdom of God."

So that's why you say it?

"That's why," he says.

Consider, though, because of what we have said above, that perhaps you may be finding eternal life apart from the kingdom of God. I mean, much was said very clearly about those two sides, the right and the left, where he allowed no place in the middle for life without the kingdom. Is that not enough to put you right, not enough to warn you? Take a little look with me at this very reading from which you have produced this statement.

*Christ, the Son of man, simultaneously in heaven and on earth*

9. You said, after all, that the reason you refuse to promise the kingdom of heaven to unbaptized babies is that the Lord's statement is unambiguous: *Unless one is born again of water and the Spirit, one will not enter into the kingdom of heaven* (Jn 3:5). Didn't you notice there, when Nicodemus was asking how these things can happen, that is, how a person can be reborn, how he can be born all

over again; because of course he can't go back into his mother's womb and be born all over again; what he heard from the Lord, what he heard from *the good master* (Mk 10:17), what error heard from Truth?

Among other things, you see, which he said to show how it may happen, he also offered a comparison. But first he said, *Nobody has gone up to heaven, except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven* (Jn 3:13). He was on earth, and he said he was in heaven; and what's more, in heaven as the Son of man, to indicate one person in both natures, both in that he was the Son of God equal to the Father, the Word of God in the beginning, God with God, and also in that he was the Son of man, taking to himself a human soul and human flesh, and coming out to mankind clothed in a man. Because in each of these there are not two Christs, two Sons of God, but one person, one Christ the Son of God, and the same one Christ, not another, being the Son of man; but the Son of God in his divinity, the Son of man in his flesh. Which of us, though, if we are at all attentive, or in the slightest degree alert, would not much rather make this distinction: the Son of God in heaven, the Son of man on earth? But to forestall any such division, and stop us thereby introducing two persons, *Nobody has gone up to heaven*, he said, *except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man*.

So the Son of man came down from heaven. Didn't he become the Son of man on earth? Wasn't he made the Son of man through Mary? "But, Mr. Man," he says, "don't separate what I wish to link together." It's little enough that the Son of man came down (it was Christ, after all, who came down, being at one and the same time Son of man and Son of God); he is seated in heaven while at the same time walking about on earth. He was in heaven, because Christ is everywhere, and one and the same Christ is both Son of God and Son of man. Because of his unity of person he is the Son of God on earth, because of the same unity of person we have proved he is the Son of man in heaven from these words of the Lord: *The Son of man*, he says, *who is in heaven*. Because of this unity of person, doesn't Peter say to him, conspicuously present on earth, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Mt 16:16)?

*Christ's members are one with their head*

10. So let Nicodemus learn how this may happen, which seemed incredible and impossible to him, while he still lacked understanding: *Nobody has gone up to heaven, except the one who came down from heaven* (Jn 3:13). But now, all who are born again clearly go up to heaven; while absolutely none of the rest do so. And all those who are reborn, go up to heaven by the grace of God; and *nobody has gone up to heaven, except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven*. How's this? Because all those who are born again become his members. And Christ alone, born of Mary, is the one Christ, and the head with his body is the one Christ.

So that's what he meant by *Nobody has gone up, except the one who came down*. So nobody has gone up, except Christ. If you want to go up, be in the



body of Christ. If you want to go up, be a member of Christ. *For just as in one body we have many members, but all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body; so also is Christ* (1 Cor 12:12); because Christ is head and body.<sup>9</sup> And how this happens, we have still to ask. The question is obscure, those depths have still to be brought to the surface.<sup>10</sup>

*Faith in Christ is necessary for salvation*

11. Christ has no sin; he neither contracted original sin, nor added any of his own; he came quite apart from the pleasure of fleshly desire, there was there no marital embrace. From the body of the virgin he did not receive the wound, but the medicine; he did not receive something to be healed, but something to heal with; I'm saying this just as far as sin is concerned.<sup>11</sup> So he alone is without sin; how then can those be his members, of whom none is without sin? How? Listen to the comparison that follows: *And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life* (Jn 3:14-15). Why were you supposing that sinful human beings cannot become members of Christ, of the one, that is, who had no sin whatsoever? You were moved by the bite of the serpent.

That's why Christ is crucified, that's why Christ sheds his blood for the forgiveness of sins; it's because of sin, that is, because of the serpent's poison. *Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, for the healing of those who were being bitten by serpents, and were told to look at it when it was lifted up, and whoever looked at it was healed;*<sup>12</sup> *so must the Son of man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him, that is, who looks at him lifted up, who is not ashamed of the crucified, who glories in the cross of Christ,*<sup>13</sup> *may not perish, but may have eternal life.* May not perish; how? By believing in him. How not perish? By looking at the one who has been lifted up; otherwise they would have perished. That, you see, is the meaning of, *that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life.*

*Babies, wounded by another's sin, are given assistance by another's faith*

12. You're bringing me babies, and telling them to look on the one who has been lifted up, even though you deny they have received the serpent's poison. Surely, if you are really well disposed to them, if you are moved by their innocence in their own personal lives, don't deny that they have contracted some guilt from the first life, not their own, but that of their first parent. Don't deny it; admit the poison, in order to beg for the medicine; otherwise they aren't cured. Or why do you tell them to believe?<sup>14</sup> Here, you see, the answer is given by those who are carrying the babies. They are healed at someone else's words, because they're wounded at someone else's deed.

"Do they believe in Jesus Christ?" goes the question; the answer is given, "They do." For infants who can't speak, who remain silent, who cry, and by

crying are somehow or other praying to be helped, the answer is given, and is effective. Or does that serpent even try to persuade people of this, that it is not effective? Far be such a thought from the minds of Christians of any sort whatsoever. So the answer is given, and it is effective. The spirit of the babies shares in a kind of common life;<sup>15</sup> they believe by means of others, because they sinned by means of another. Or have they perhaps found the life of this present age, given birth to by infirmity, and not found the life of the age to come, given birth to by charity?

*The brazen serpent a figure of Christ,  
made in the likeness of sinful flesh*

13. So just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone bitten by a serpent might gaze on the one lifted up and be healed; in the same way it was necessary for the Son of man to be lifted up, so that everyone poisoned by the serpent might gaze on him as he was lifted up, and be healed. Adam was the first to receive<sup>16</sup> the bite of the serpent with its poison; so the one born in the flesh of sin is saved in Christ through *the likeness of the flesh of sin* (Rom 8:3).

God, you see, sent his Son, not in the flesh of sin, but, as the one who wrote this continues, *in the likeness of the flesh of sin*; because born not of a marital embrace, but of a virginal womb. He sent him in the likeness of the flesh of sin—what for? *In order that from sin he might condemn sin in the flesh* (Rom 8:3); from sin, sin, from the serpent, the serpent. Can there be any doubt, after all, that under the name of serpent sin is being referred to? So, from sin, sin, from the serpent, the serpent; but from the likeness of it, because in Christ there is no sin, but only the likeness of the flesh of sin.

That's why the serpent was lifted up, but a brazen one; it was the likeness of the flesh of sin that was lifted up, so that the origin of sin might be healed.<sup>17</sup> Because *God sent his Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin*; not in the likeness of the flesh, because it is real flesh, but *in the likeness of the flesh of sin*, because it is mortal flesh without any sin at all. *So that from sin*, because of the likeness, *he might condemn sin in the flesh*, because of real iniquity. There was no real iniquity in Christ; but there was mortality in him. He didn't take on sin, but he took on the punishment of sin. By taking on the punishment without the fault, he cured both punishment and fault.

There you have how these things happen. Which is what Nicodemus was wondering when he said *How can these things happen?* (Jn 3:9). That, you see, is how we are healed; it isn't because we deserve it. There you are, that's how these things happen. Now where are you going to put me the babies? You are already saying they aren't wounded by any poisonous bite. Then take them away from gazing on the serpent that has been lifted up. But if you don't take them away, you are saying that they need healing, you are confessing they have been poisoned.

*No salvation without faith in Christ;  
baptized infants are called believers*

14. And then didn't you hear what the Lord himself said, in this same talk with Nicodemus, when this same reading was read today? *Whoever believes in him is not judged; but whoever does not believe has already been judged* (Jn 3:18). But what does that mean, *has already been judged*? Has been condemned. You know, of course, that "judgment" is often put for "condemnation"; the scriptures provide the evidence, above all with that one plainest piece of evidence that nobody can gainsay: when the Lord was dealing with the resurrection, *Those who have done good, he said, to the resurrection of life; those who have done evil to the resurrection of the judgment* (Jn 5:29); obviously, he put "judgment" for "condemnation."

And you, Sir, have the nerve to argue or believe otherwise? *Whoever does not believe has already been judged*. In another place, *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life*; which you were promising to unbaptized babies. *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life*.

"But so does the baby," he says, "who does not believe, though it doesn't have the kingdom of God."

But see what follows: *But whoever lacks faith in the Son does not have life; but the wrath of God abides upon him* (Jn 3:36).

Where do you place baptized babies? Surely in the ranks of believers. I mean, that's why even by the ancient, canonical, and well-established custom of the Church baptized babies are called the faithful. And that's how we inquire about them: "Is this infant a Christian?"

"Yes, a Christian," is the answer.

"Catechumen, or one of the faithful?"

"One of the faithful." From faith, of course, and faith from believing. So you will count baptized babies among believers; nor will you dare in any way at all to judge otherwise, if you don't want to be a manifest heretic. So that's why they have eternal life; because *whoever believes in the Son has eternal life*.

Don't promise them eternal life without this faith, and without that sacrament of this faith. *But whoever lacks faith in the Son, and whoever does not believe in the Son, does not have life, but the wrath of God abides upon him*. He didn't say, "will come upon him," but *abides upon him*. He was looking back at the origin when he said, *the wrath of God abides upon him*. The apostle too was looking back at it when he said, *We too were once by nature children of wrath* (Eph 2:3). We aren't accusing nature. God is the author of nature. Nature was set up by God as good; but through ill-will it was vitiated by the serpent.

That's why what was in Adam a matter of fault, not of nature, has now become for us, his progeny, a matter of nature. From this vice of nature, with which human beings are born, only the one who was born without the vice can set them free. From this flesh of sin the only one who can set us free is the one who was born without sin through the likeness of the flesh of sin. From this poison of the serpent only the lifting up of the serpent can set free. What do you say to that? Is that enough for you?<sup>18</sup>

*Against the Pelagian view that sin passed from Adam  
to all by simple imitation*

15. Give your minds for a moment to one very shrewd point that is regularly put forward by them. It's when they begin to be pressed hard by the words of the apostle, where he says, *Through one man sin entered into the world—and through sin death; and thus it passed into all men—in whom all sinned* (Rom 5:12). Words which I don't think anybody could fail to understand; words for which I doubt if anybody requires an expositor. Well, they attempt an answer, by saying that the reason this was said by the apostle was that Adam was the first to sin, and those who sinned later on sinned by imitating him. What else is this but an attempt to shed darkness over open light? *Sin entered through one man—and through sin death; and thus it passed into all men—in whom all sinned*. You say on account of imitation, because Adam was the first to sin.

I answer straightaway: Adam was not the first to sin; if you're looking for the first sinner, look at the devil. But the apostle wished to show the whole mass or lump of the human race poisoned from its origin, and that's why he mentioned the one from whom we were born, not the one whom we imitated. The one you imitate is indeed also called your father; *My children*, he says, *with whom I am again in labor* (Gal 4:19); in the same way he says, *Be imitators of me* (1 Cor 4:16). And it's because of this business of imitation that the godless are told, *You are from your father, the devil* (Jn 8:44). You see, it's agreed in the Catholic faith that the devil neither begot our nature nor made it; the only thing with him is seduction coming first, imitation following.

Finally, in the same way as it is said about Adam, *in whom all sinned*,<sup>19</sup> read me where it says, "All sinned in the devil." It's one thing to sin with him going ahead and leading astray, another to sin in him.<sup>20</sup> Because in terms of the propagation of the flesh we were all in him, before we were born; as in a parent, as in a root, we were there; thus the tree where we were was poisoned. Because as for the devil, that is the author of sin, and indeed the first sinner, it's not origin, but imitation that relates us to him, seeing that scripture was talking about him where it says, *By the envy of the devil death entered into the whole world; but those who are of his party imitate him* (Wis 2:24). It's by imitating him that they belong to his party; it didn't say, did it, "In him they sinned"? When, however it was a question of Adam, then on account of our origin, on account of his posterity, on account of the offspring of his loins, it said *in whom all sinned*.

After all, if the reason Adam was put first was that he was the first to sin, as if by way of example, not of origin, why at such an enormous distance, after such a long drawn out stretch of time, is Christ required against Adam? If all sinners are related to Adam simply because he was the first sinner, then all the just should have been related to Abel, because he was the first just man;<sup>21</sup> why is Christ required? Wake up, brother! Why is Christ required, if not because human generation and birth was condemned in Adam, regeneration and rebirth is to be sought in Christ?

*A Pelagian objection to the idea of original sin; why are not the children of baptized parents born just?*

16. Accordingly, let no one deceive us. It's evident from scripture, it's based four-square on authority, it's thoroughly Catholic faith. Every one born is condemned; no one is set free, unless born again. Now you, dearly beloved, informed by this principle, can answer another cunning argument of theirs; when they say, and worry the little ones, "If sinners are born to a sinner, why are just offspring not born to the one baptized and now a believer, all of whose sins have been forgiven?" Answer straightaway: "The reason one who is not just is born to a baptized man, is that he doesn't generate him in the way he was regenerated, but in the way he was himself generated. Of Christ it is said, *Done to death in the flesh, made alive in the spirit* (1 Pt 3:18); in the same way of man it can be said, "Corrupted in the flesh, justified in the spirit." *What is born of the flesh is flesh* (Jn 3:6). You are looking for a just person to be born of a just man, when you can see that it is altogether impossible for anyone to be just unless born again. Nor are you paying attention to that statement of the Lord's which you yourself have on your lips: *If anyone is not born again of water and the Spirit* (Jn 3:5). I rather think that this hasn't happened in the marriage bed.

You wonder why a sinner should be born of the seed of a just man; don't you like to wonder why a wild olive is born of the seed of an olive tree? Here's another comparison: treat the baptized just man as a grain that has been cleaned; don't you observe that from this clean grain wheat is born with the chaff, without which it was sown? Again, while the propagation of those who are born is a matter of carnal generation, the propagation of those who are reborn a matter of spiritual regeneration, do you really want a person to be born baptized of a baptized person, when you can see that a person is not born circumcised of a circumcised person? Certainly this kind of generation is a carnal act, and circumcision is a carnal act; and yet the offspring of a circumcised man is not born circumcised. So in the same way the offspring of a baptized man cannot be born baptized; because nobody is born again before being born.

*Infants believe with the faith of their parents*

17. Here's another apparently very sharp point of theirs; but is there any sharp point that can't be blunted by the shield of truth? Something else they say; see what sort of thing it is. "If Adam," they say, "harms those who haven't sinned, then Christ ought to benefit even those who haven't believed." You can certainly see what a sharp point this is against the truth; listen to how much it assists the truth. The one who says this, you see, is simply saying that Christ is of no benefit to those who don't believe. That's true. Who doesn't accept that? Who doesn't agree that Christ doesn't benefit those who don't believe, that he does benefit those who do?

But tell me, please: does Christ benefit baptized babies, or does he not?

They're bound to say that he does; they are constrained to by the whole bulk of mother Church. Perhaps, indeed, they would like to say he doesn't, because

all their arguments appear to drive them in that direction. But they are pressed back from it by the authority of the Church; otherwise they would be, I won't say smothered by the spittle of men, but swept away, as in a flood, by the tears of their own infants. If they say, you see, that Christ is of no benefit to baptized infants, what they are in fact saying is that infants are baptized quite unnecessarily. But for it not to be quite unnecessary to baptize them, because they daren't say that, they agree that Christ does benefit baptized infants.

If he benefits them when they are baptized, I ask whether he is of benefit to them as believing or as not believing. They may choose which they like. If they say, "As not believing," where then is the false charge you were bringing, that Christ cannot be of benefit to those who don't believe?<sup>22</sup> Here you are, admitting he is of benefit to infants, not however as believing. He is of benefit to them for anything and everything; don't imagine it's just for eternal life, just for eternal salvation. Christ of course is of benefit to baptized babies for the acquisition of the kingdom of heaven itself. So is he of benefit to them as not believing? But God forbid I should say that infants are not believers. I have already argued earlier on, it believes in another, just as it sinned in another. It's said on its behalf, "It believes," and that is effective, and the infant is counted among the baptized faithful. This has the authority of mother Church behind it, this is maintained by the well-established rule of truth; whoever brings his battering ram against this solid oak, against this unbreachable wall, is shattered to bits himself. So Christ is of some benefit to baptized infants; and as I say, and as the whole Church says with me, he is of benefit to them as believers, of benefit to them as belonging to the faithful; as for you, choose which you like.

I, of course, would like you to choose the truer proposition; to say with us that he benefits them as believers. But if you say he is of benefit to them as not believing, you have said it against yourself. If you say he is of benefit to them as believers, you have said it with me. Choose, whether to say against yourself what is false, or to say with me what is true. You, after all, were saying a little while ago that Christ is of no benefit to those who don't believe, hoping thereby to establish that in the same way Adam too was of no harm to those who don't sin, just as Christ is of no benefit to those who don't believe. And here you are, now admitting that Christ is of some benefit to baptized infants who don't believe. But if you say he is of benefit to them as believers, you say well, you say it with me; infants too believe.

What do they believe with? How do they believe? With the faith of their parents. If they are cleansed by the faith of their parents, they were defiled by the sin of their parents.<sup>23</sup> The body of death in their first parents generated them as sinners; the spirit of life in their later parents regenerated them as believers. You attribute faith to babies who don't answer for themselves, and I attribute sin to babies who don't do anything themselves.

*The words of the apostle brought up as an argument against the idea of original sin*

18. "Holy ones," he says, "ought to be born of holy ones; because the apostle said, *Otherwise your children would be unclean; but now they are holy*" (1 Cor 7:14). And how do you take that? How do you understand it? That one born of faithful parents is holy in such a way that he doesn't need to be baptized? You can take this holiness however you like. There are many kinds of holiness, after all, and many kinds of sanctification. Not everything, I mean, that is sanctified is intended for the kingdom of heaven. The apostle said about our food, *It is sanctified by the word of God and prayer* (1 Tm 4:5). Just because our food is sanctified, are we ignorant of where it's destined for? So you must realize that there is a manner and a kind of shadow of sanctification which is not enough for obtaining salvation. It's different, and in what way different, only God knows.

All the same, continue to hurry along to baptism with the child of believers; the parents mustn't make the mistake of thinking that he is born a believer already. After all, they can say he's been born, not that he's been reborn. Because, to show you how you should understand the children of believers being sanctified, to save me inquiring now, because it would take too long, into the manner of this sanctification—in the same place, where you also have an unbelieving husband, you also have a believing wife. *The unbelieving man*, he says, *is sanctified in his wife, and the unbelieving woman is sanctified in the brother* (1 Cor 7:14). Does that mean that because there is, doubtless, some manner of sanctification there, so that the unbelieving man is sanctified in his believing wife, he should therefore now receive the assurance that he is going to enter the kingdom of heaven, and that without having to be baptized, without having to be born again, without having to be redeemed by the blood of Christ? So just as the unbelieving man is sanctified in his wife, and yet perishes if he isn't baptized; in the same way the children of the faithful, even though sanctified in some fashion, perish all the same if they are not baptized.

*The authority of Cyprian on original sin*

19. I beg you, please be quiet for a little while longer.<sup>24</sup> I'm only going to read to you. It's Saint Cyprian whom I have just taken into my hands, a previous bishop of this see. Listen for a moment to what he held about the baptism of infants, or rather what he demonstrated that the Church had always held. It's not enough, you see, for these people to hold forth and argue in favor of goodness knows what ungodly novelties; they also try to convict us of saying something new. So that's why I'm reading Saint Cyprian, so that you may see the canonical meaning, and the Catholic sense in the words I have been using just now.

He was asked whether an infant ought to be baptized before the eighth day, because in the old law it was not lawful for an infant to be circumcised except on the eighth day. The question arose about the day of baptizing; because about the origin of sin there was no question; and that's why, on the strength of this

point about which there was no question, the question that had arisen was solved. Saint Cyprian said, among the other things which I have said above:

For this reason, we think that nobody should be hindered from obtaining grace by a law that had already been passed, and that spiritual circumcision should not be hindered by the circumcision of the flesh; but that absolutely everyone should be admitted to the grace of Christ, considering how Peter too speaks in the Acts of the Apostles, and says *God told me that nobody is to be called common and unclean* (Acts 10:28). For the rest, if there is anything that could hinder people from obtaining grace, it is the graver sins that could hinder adults and old people and elders.

But if in fact remission of sins is granted even to the most heinous offenders and to those who previously sinned very much against the Lord, when they have later on come to believe, and if nobody is ever turned away from baptism and grace;<sup>25</sup> how much more should an infant not be turned away, who being newly born has committed no sin, except that being born in the flesh according to Adam, it has contracted in its first birth the contagion of the ancient death. Surely it can come all the more easily to the reception of the remission of sins, in that what it is being forgiven are not its own sins, but someone else's.<sup>26</sup>

Notice how, having no doubts about this matter, he solves the one there were doubts about. He took this from the foundations of the Church, to fix firmly in place a stone that was working loose.

*Let us refrain from calling our erring brethren heretics,  
and ask them not to call us heretics either*

20. So let us obtain the favor from our brothers, if we can, not anymore to call us heretics, which we could probably call them if we wanted to, considering the opinions they air, and yet we don't. May their tender-hearted mother bear with them as in need of healing, carry them along as in need of teaching, in order not to have to bewail them as finally dead. It's beyond the pale, where they are heading; it's too much, scarcely to be borne, very great patience is needed to bear it. May they not abuse this patience of the Church; should they straighten themselves out, that's good. We are exhorting them as friends, not quarreling with them as enemies. They speak disparagingly of us, we can bear it; let them not disparage the rule of faith, not disparage the truth; let them not speak against holy Church, toiling away every day for the remission of original sin in babies.

This matter is fundamental. Someone who goes wrong in the discussion of other questions that have not been thoroughly canvassed, not yet firmly settled by the Church's full authority, is to be tolerated. Error in that case is to be tolerated; it should not go so far, though, as to strive to shake the very foundation of the Church. It's not expedient<sup>27</sup>—our patience is still, perhaps, not to be faulted; but we should be afraid of being blamed also for negligence. Let that be enough for your graces. Deal with those whom you know to be such, deal



with them in a friendly way, fraternally, calmly, lovingly, anxiously. Let piety do whatever it can; because later on impiety must not be shown any favor.

Turning to the Lord, etc.

### NOTES

1. The date is universally agreed (with one dissenting voice) from the Maurists onward. The sermon opens with a reference back to what is almost certainly Sermon 293, preached three days earlier. The place is Carthage; see section 19.

About the martyr Guddens it is impossible to discover anything from the works of reference available to me. Not even the name or sex of the saint is certain; a manuscript in Rome puts him in the masculine gender, another in Monte Cassino makes her a virgin martyr, who may have been called Guddenis. In one martyrology she appears as Guadanis, in another he is called Gaudentius. And of course in this sermon Augustine tells us nothing whatever about her or him. Poor girl—if girl she was—she is entirely swamped by the baptism of infants, or rather by the terrible fate of infants dying unbaptized.

It is an extraordinary, important, interesting, and yes, rather bad sermon. In it we seem to see Augustine arguing for a theological conclusion, which he treated as almost a dogma, of which his intellect was utterly convinced, and from which his heart recoiled: that babies dying unbaptized go to hell. So he is prey to an inner conflict that produces what is, as I have suggested, really a rather bad sermon. But on that readers must judge for themselves.

2. I doubt if he has in mind some formal decision of a Council, or of the Apostolic See, by this expression; but simply the long established tradition both of baptizing infants and of holding the doctrine of original sin.

3. Nowadays the common teaching of the Church will be much less dogmatic on this point than Augustine was; and indeed it is probably true to say, that the most common opinion of theologians on this point is that babies dying unbaptized are saved, through the mercy of God who, as the theological saying goes, is not bound by the sacraments. For a full discussion of the point, see my book *Being Human* (London, 1984), chapter 8, section C, pages 79-83. A most convincing solution to the dilemma is given in a book by V. Wilkin, S.J., published posthumously, *From Limbo to Heaven* (London, 1961).

4. The poor man is clearly not at his best this morning!

5. Reading *non parvulos non baptizatos* instead of, as punctuated rather perversely by the Maurists and subsequent editions, *non parvulos, non baptizatos*—not into babies, not into the baptized.

6. Now, I think, the congregation, not the Pelagians he has just been addressing. The people whose side he is taking for the moment are the more dangerous opponents, because they don't make the feeble distinction which the Pelagians make, and so they deny the necessity or value of infant baptism altogether.

7. An excellent argument against the whole concept of limbo, in which, as Augustine himself says somewhere, babies who have died unbaptized suffer only the mildest of pains, *mitissimas poenas, Enchiridion*, 93. It is true he did not consider them innocent in the strict sense, since they are tarred with the brush of original sin. But as a kind of sop to the mercy of God, the concept of limbo, surely, won't really do.

In all this matter Augustine claims to be relying on authority, that is on scriptural revelation. But he reaches his conclusion just as much by a process of reasoning as he here taunts the Pelagians with indulging in. It is precisely a reasoned conclusion from premises provided by the authority of revelation. And its weakness is that the premises are too limited, and in one case too rigidly interpreted. See note 3 above, and the references given there.

8. It is not clear, either from Augustine's quotation or Paul's text quoted, whether it is from one man, Adam, or from one transgression, Adam's sin. In any case, his conclusion is that all, including babies, are affected by this, and are involved through solidarity in a flawed human nature, in what we call original sin. This is indeed defined Catholic doctrine. What is not so defined, and is indeed not so necessary a conclusion, is that babies who die unbaptized therefore go to hell. Augustine assumed that baptism was the only means of liberating grace available to them. And it is precisely this assumption that renders his whole argument weak, and his conclusion highly questionable. He is, in effect, setting limits to divine grace, which he does not set to the effects of Adam's sin.

9. In 1 Cor 12 Christ is not being presented as the head of the body of which we are the members, but as the whole body, of which some of us are ears and eyes as well as feet and hands. The body image of Christ the head, as distinct from the body (the trunk) the Church, comes from Eph 4:15-16 and Col 1:18. It is thus, in fact, a Deutero-Pauline variation on the theme of the Church as the body of Christ, as wholly identified with Christ, that is; not as distinct from him and subordinate to him, and then joined to him.

10. Reading *exaltanda illa profunditas* instead of the text's *exaltatur illa profunditas*; those depths are being raised up; but they aren't, yet.

11. Because of course Christ did take on something to be healed, in that he took on human nature, which was in need of healing or cure. But he didn't take on what it needed to be cured of.

12. See Num 21:6-9.

13. See Gal 6:14.

14. A reference to the first part of the baptismal liturgy.

15. The *spiritus* shares in *conspiratione quadam*; their breath shares in a kind of fellow-breathing.

16. Or, "the first Adam received. . ."

17. By "the origin of sin" he means, I think, the flesh.

18. I don't know how the Pelagians would answer, as they denied the doctrine of original sin. But we who, thanks almost entirely to Augustine, accept the doctrine, may well answer, "Yes, it's enough to show that only Christ can liberate even babies from the bondage and penalties of sin; but it is not enough to demonstrate that the only way he can do this is by getting them baptized. By so concluding, you are setting limits to the power of his grace, to his power and his will to save."

19. This sermon is the first one, so far, in which Augustine unmistakably takes *in quo omnes peccaverunt* to mean *in whom*—that is, in Adam—all sinned. It is an extremely arbitrary procedure to make Adam the antecedent of that pronoun, seeing that several other significant nouns have come between him and it. In Sermons 115, 4 and 165, 7 and 9, I translated the phrase "in that all have sinned," because his comments did not require one to assume that he read it as "in whom all have sinned." See Sermon 115, note 10.

20. Adam now, not the devil.

21. See Mt 23:35.

22. But Augustine agreed with them at the beginning of this section that Christ does not benefit those who don't believe. So why does he call this now a false charge? The answer may appear at the end of this section and of a quite unusually tortuous, not to say tortured, piece of reasoning.

23. There is an elementary equivocation in his argument here; they are not the same parents in each case. (Or is it the logical flaw of a "distributed middle"?)

24. Audible signs were heard, no doubt, of an entirely justifiable restlessness and impatience as they saw him pick up another book and open it.

25. In Africa baptism was often called, simply, grace.

26. Letter 59, 5, to Fidus: PL 3, 1054.

27. He leaves unsaid what is not expedient; he is probably thinking of some formal disciplinary measures, for which he and the other bishops do not think the time has yet come.

## SERMON 295

ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

Date: 410<sup>1</sup>

*"Peter" from "petra," the rock which is Christ*

1. This day has been consecrated for us by the martyrdoms of the most blessed apostles Peter and Paul. It's not some obscure martyrs we are talking about. *Their sound has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the wide world* (Ps 19:4). These martyrs had seen what they proclaimed, they pursued justice by confessing the truth, by dying for the truth. The blessed Peter, the first of the apostles, the ardent lover of Christ, who was found worthy to hear, *And I say to you, that you are Peter*. He himself, you see, had just said, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*. Christ said to him, *And I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church* (Mt 16:16.18). Upon this rock I will build the faith which you have just confessed. Upon what you have just said, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*, I will build my Church; because you are Peter.

Peter, Rocky, from rock, not rock from Rocky. Peter comes from *petra*, rock, in exactly the same way as Christian comes from Christ. Do you want to know what rock Peter is called after? Listen to Paul: *I would not have you ignorant, brothers, the apostle of Christ says; I would not have you ignorant, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized in Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the rock that was following them, and the rock was Christ* (1 Cor 10:1-4). There you have where Rocky, Peter, is from.

*It was to Peter as representing the Church that the keys of the kingdom of heaven were entrusted*

2. Before his passion the Lord Jesus, as you know, chose those disciples of his, whom he called apostles. Among these it was only Peter who almost everywhere was given the privilege of representing the whole Church.<sup>2</sup> It was in the person of the whole Church, which he alone represented, that he was

privileged to hear, *To you will I give the keys of the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 16:19). After all, it isn't just one man that received these keys, but the Church in its unity. So this is the reason for Peter's acknowledged pre-eminence, that he stood for the Church's universality and unity, when he was told, *To you I am entrusting*, what has in fact been entrusted to all.

I mean, to show you that it is the Church which has received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, listen to what the Lord says in another place to all his apostles: *Receive the Holy Spirit; and straightaway, Whose sins you forgive, they will be forgiven them; whose sins you retain, they will be retained* (Jn 20:22-23). This refers to the keys, about which it is said, *whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven* (Mt 16:19). But that was said to Peter. To show you that Peter at that time stood for the universal Church, listen to what is said to him,<sup>3</sup> what is said to all the faithful, the saints:<sup>4</sup> *If your brother sins against you, correct him between you and himself alone. If he does not listen to you, bring with you one or two; for it is written, By the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every matter be settled. If he does not even listen to them, refer him to the Church; if he does not even listen to her, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax collector. Amen amen I tell you, that whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (Mt 18:15-18). It is the dove<sup>5</sup> that binds, the dove that looses, the building built upon the rock that binds and looses.

Let those who are bound fear, those who are loosed fear. Let those who are loosed be afraid of being bound; those who are bound pray to be loosed. *Each one is tied up in the threads of his own sins* (Prv 5:22). And apart from the Church, nothing is loosed. One four days dead is told, *Lazarus, come forth in the open* (Jn 11:43), and he came forth from the tomb tied hand and foot with bandages. The Lord rouses him, so that the dead man may come forth from the tomb; this means he touches the heart, so that the confession of sin may come out in the open. But that's not enough, he's still bound. So after Lazarus had come out of the tomb, the Lord turned to his disciples, whom he had told, *Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and said, Loose him, and let him go* (Jn 11:44). He roused him by himself, he loosed him through the disciples.

*Both the strength and the weakness of the Church illustrated in Peter*

3. Furthermore, the Church's strength and courage is supremely presented to us in Peter; because he followed the Lord as he went to his passion; and also something of its weakness is to be observed there, since when he was questioned by a maid, he repudiated the Lord. Here's the great lover suddenly turned repudiator. He discovered himself, though, this one who had been so sure of himself. He had said, of course, as you know, *Lord, I will be with you to the death; and if I have to die, I will lay down my life for you* (Lk 22:33; Jn 13:37). And the Lord answered this self-reliance, *You will lay down your life for me? Amen I tell you, before the cock crows, you will repudiate me three times* (Jn

13:38). It happened just as the doctor had foretold; what the sick man had been so sure about could not happen. But what did? Immediately the Lord looked round at him. That's what's written, that's what the gospel says: *The Lord looked round at him, and he went out in the open air, and wept bitterly* (Lk 22:61-62). He went out in the open; that is, to confess.<sup>6</sup> He wept bitterly, because he had known how to love. The sweetness of love followed, because the bitterness of sorrow had gone first.

*Again Peter stands for the Church when Christ commends his sheep and lambs to him to be fed*

4. Quite rightly too did the Lord after his resurrection entrust his sheep to Peter to be fed. It's not, you see, that he alone among the disciples was fit to feed the Lord's sheep; but when Christ speaks to one man, unity is being commended to us. And he first speaks to Peter, because Peter is the first among the apostles. *Simon son of John*, says the Lord, *do you love me?* He answers, *I do*. And he's asked again, and answers again. And when he's asked a third time, as if he wasn't believed, he feels hurt. But how could the one who could see his heart not believe him? Then, when he feels hurt like that, this is how he answers: *Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you* (Jn 21:15-17). I mean, as you know everything, you cannot be ignorant of this one thing.

Don't feel hurt, apostle. Answer once, answer again, answer a third time. Let confession conquer three times with love, because self-assurance was conquered three times by fear. What you had bound three times must be loosed three times. Loose through love what you had bound through fear. And for all that, the Lord once, and again, and a third time, entrusted his sheep to Peter.

*Against the Donatists, for calling the sheep theirs, not Christ's*

5. Pay close attention, my brothers and sisters. *Feed my little sheep*, he says, *feed my lambs* (Jn 21:15-17). *Feed my sheep*; he didn't say "yours," did he? Feed, good servant, the Lord's sheep, which bear the Lord's brand.<sup>7</sup> After all, *was Paul crucified for you, or were you baptized in the name of Peter and Paul?* (1 Cor 1:13). So feed *his* sheep, washed in *his* baptism, sealed<sup>8</sup> in *his* name, redeemed with *his* blood. *Feed*, he says, *my sheep*. The heretics, you see, are bad and runaway slaves, who divide among themselves what they haven't bought, and out of their thefts make themselves something like their own private nest-eggs,<sup>9</sup> and so consider themselves to be feeding their own sheep. What else, after all, I ask you, is, "Unless I baptize you, you will be unclean; unless you have my baptism, you will not be really washed"? Have you really never heard, *Cursed is everyone who places his hopes in man* (Jer 17:5)?

Accordingly, dearly beloved, those whom Peter baptized are Christ's sheep; and those whom Judas baptized are Christ's sheep. Notice, I mean, what the bridegroom says to his beloved in the Song of Songs, when the bride had said to him, *Tell me, you that my soul loves, where you pasture, where you lie down*

*in the noonday; lest perchance I become as one covered, upon the flocks of your companions* (Sg 1:6). *Tell me*, she says, *where you pasture, where you lie down in the noonday*, in the splendor of truth, in the fervor of charity. Why are you afraid, O beloved, what are you afraid of? *Lest perchance*, she says, *I become as one covered*, that is as one obscure, as one not the Church. Because the Church is not covered; *A city, after all, that is set on a hill cannot be hidden* (Mt 5:14). *And by losing the way stumble not on your flock, but on the flocks of your companions*. It's in fact the heretics who are being called companions. *They went out from us* (1 Jn 2:19). Before they went out, they had access with us to one table.

So what reply is she given? *Unless you know yourself*. It's the bridegroom saying it, answering her question. *Unless you know yourself, O beautiful among women* (Sg 1:7). O truthful among heresies, *unless you know yourself*. Because such great things were foretold about you; *In your seed shall all the nations be blessed* (Gn 22:18); *The God of gods, the Lord, has spoken and summoned the earth, from the rising of the sun to its setting* (Ps 50:1); *Request of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and for your possession the limits of the earth* (Ps 2:8); *Their sound has gone forth to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the wide world* (Ps 19:4); it's of you that these testimonies were foretold. So, *unless you know yourself, go out yourself*. You see, I'm not throwing you out, so that those who stay behind can say about you, *They went out from us*. *Go out yourself in the tracks of the flocks*; not of the flock, about which it is said, *There shall be one flock and one shepherd* (Jn 10:16). *Go out yourself in the tracks of the flocks, and feed your goats* (Sg 1:7); not like Peter, *my sheep*. It was for these sheep committed to him that Peter was found worthy to be crowned with a martyrdom, which won the right to be celebrated by today's solemnity throughout the world.

*Paul, first a persecutor, becomes a preacher of Christ*

6. And let Paul also come from Saul, the lamb from the wolf; first an enemy, later on an apostle, first a persecutor, later on a preacher. Let him come, let him receive letters from the chief priests, in order that wherever he finds Christians, he may bring them along for punishment. Let him take the letters, take them, set out, go on his way, breathe out slaughter, thirst for blood: *The one who dwells in the heavens will laugh him to scorn* (Ps 2:4). He was going, you see, as it is written, *breathing out slaughter*, and getting near to Damascus. Then the Lord intervened from heaven: *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* (Acts 9:1.4). I myself am here, I myself there; here the head, there the body. So don't let's be surprised, brothers and sisters; we belong to the body of Christ. *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goad* (Acts 26:14). It's yourself you're hurting, because my Church grows with persecutions. *But he said, fearful and trembling, Lord, who are you? And he answered, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting* (Acts 9:4-5).

A changed man in a moment, he waits for an order;<sup>10</sup> he lays aside his

vindictive jealousy, he prepares to obey. He's told what to do. And before Paul is baptized, the Lord speaks to Ananias: *Go to that street, to that man, Saul by name; baptize him, because he is for me a chosen vessel.* A vessel is meant to carry something, a vessel shouldn't stay empty. A vessel to be filled; what with, but grace? Ananias, though, answered our Lord Jesus Christ, *Lord, I have heard that this man has done much evil to your saints. And now he is bringing letters from the chief priests, that wherever he finds men of this way, he is to take them along in chains. And the Lord said to him, I will show him what things he must suffer for the sake of my name* (Acts 9:11-16). Ananias trembled at the name of Saul; the weak sheep trembled at the reputation of the wolf, even under the hand of the shepherd.

*The sufferings of Paul and Peter*

7. There you are, the Lord showed him what things he would have to suffer for the sake of his name. After that he tested and trained him with hardships. It was he that tested him with chains, he that did it with beatings, he with imprisonments, he with shipwrecks.<sup>11</sup> He it was that procured him his passion, he that brought him finally to this day. One day for the passion of two apostles. But those two also were as one; although they suffered on different days, they were as one. Peter went first, Paul followed, who was first Saul, later Paul; because first proud, later humble. Saul, from Saul the persecutor of Saint David. Thrown down as a persecutor, he was raised up as a preacher. He changed the name of a proud man to one of humility. Paul, you see, means little. Consider the words your graces use; don't we say every day, "I will see you *post paululum*, in a little while; *paulo post*, a little later I will do this or that"? So what is Paul? Ask the man himself: *I, he says, am the least of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:9).

*Let us love the faith and lives of the apostles,  
and make progress ourselves by loving them*

8. We are celebrating a feast day, consecrated for us by the blood of the apostles. Let us love their faith, their lives, their labors, their sufferings, their confession of faith, their preaching. We make progress ourselves, you see, by loving them, not by celebrating these things just for worldly pleasure and enjoyment. After all, what are the martyrs looking for from us? They must have very little, if they are still looking for human praises. If they're still looking for human praises, they haven't yet overcome. But if they have overcome, they are not looking for anything from us for their own sakes; but they are looking for it for our sakes. So let our way be directed toward the Lord.<sup>12</sup> It was a narrow way, a thorny way, a rough way; but with the passage of so many, and such wonderful feet it has become smooth. The Lord himself went along it first, the apostles went along it fearlessly; after them the martyrs, boys, women, girls. But who was in them? The one who said, *Without me you can do nothing* (Jn 15:5).

## NOTES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11. See 2 Cor 11:23-27.

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



## SERMON 296

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

Date: 411<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*I do love you.*

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

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

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

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

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

What sheep?

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

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

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

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

*Complaints about Rome being sacked during Christian times*

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

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

What's this you're saying?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What didn't you want to happen?

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

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

"But why does God want this?"

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

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

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

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

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

*How to answer those who blame the Christian times*

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

Who are you, saying this?

"A Christian."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### NOTES

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

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

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

3. See Lk 22:54-62.

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

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

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

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

8. *Aut effectu, aut affectu*.

9. See Dn 3:19-23.

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

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

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

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

14. The wisdom of understanding God’s plans.

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

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

17. He now turns against the complaining Christian.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

25. See Ez 33:6, etc.

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

27. Just after the debate.

28. See Ez 34:20-21.

29. This is where the Maurists rejoin us.

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

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

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

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

## SERMON 297

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

Date: 418<sup>1</sup>

*Peter's fear and love compared*

1. It was the blood of the apostles that made today a feast for us. The servants paid back what had been spent for them in the blood of the Lord. The blessed Peter, as we have just heard, is ordered to follow;<sup>2</sup> and yet he had originally been thinking of going ahead, when he said to the Lord, *I will lay down my life for you* (Jn 13:37). He was so sure of himself, he was unaware of his fear. He wanted to go ahead of the one he should be following. It was a good thing he was eager to do, but he didn't keep to the right order. How bitter death would be, he realized with the bitterness of fear, and he washed away the sin of bitter fear with bitter tears.<sup>3</sup> Fear was questioned by the maid servant, love by the Lord.<sup>4</sup> And what did fear answer with, but human panic? What did love answer with, but a divine declaration? To love God, you see, is God's gift. When the Lord was asking Peter about love, he was demanding the return of what he had given.

*Even now, Peter is told that he will be reluctant to die*

2. What, though, was it that the Lord foretold to Peter, which is celebrated by this feast day? *When you were younger, he said, you used to gird yourself, and go where you wished; but when you are old, another will gird you, and carry you where you do not wish* (Jn 21:18). Where now is, *I will be with you to the death* (Lk 22:33)? Where is, *I will lay down my life for you* (Jn 13:37)? There you are, you were afraid, there you are, you denied, there you are, you wept;<sup>5</sup> and the one for whom you were afraid to die will rise again, and you will be strengthened.

What's so surprising, after all, about Peter being afraid, before Christ had risen? But here now Christ has already risen, he is already to be seen in the full reality of body and soul, already what has been promised is being confirmed by example. The Lord is seen alive after the cross, after death, after the tomb. It's little enough that he's seen; he's also touched, handled, tested. He spent forty days with his disciples, going in and coming out, eating and drinking, not out

of any need, but to show that he could; not out of necessity, but out of love; eating and drinking, not because he was hungry and thirsty, but to teach and demonstrate a lesson. Thus proved to be true and truthful, he ascends into heaven, sends the Holy Spirit, fills them believing and praying, sends them out preaching.

And yet, after all this, another girds Peter, and carries him where he himself does not wish to go. What you were quite willing for when the Lord was foretelling it, you should also be willing for when you had to follow.<sup>6</sup>

*Peter did not want to die, but he preferred to follow Christ*

3. *Another girds you, and carries you where you do not wish.* The Lord reassures us about this sort of thing, and transposes to himself our weakness, when he says, *My soul is sorrowful to the death* (Mk 14:34). This is what makes the martyrs great, that they trampled on the sweetness of this world; this is what makes the martyrs great, that they endured the harsh brutality of a bitter death. I mean, if it's easy to face death, what great thing did the martyrs endure in exchange for the Lord's death? What makes them great, what raises them high above the rest of Christians, crowned with fresher laurels? Why is it, as the faithful know, that the martyrs names are recited in their own place, quite distinct from the faithful;<sup>7</sup> and that the Church doesn't pray for them, but commends itself to their prayers? Why all this, if not because death, which they chose to endure for confessing the Lord rather than deny Christ, is of course something bitter?

Of course nature shrinks from death. Look at every kind of animal, you won't find one that doesn't wish to live, that is not afraid to perish. The human race has this same instinct. Death is harsh; but just because death is harsh, that is no reason, I say, for denying life.<sup>8</sup> Peter, even as an old man, didn't want to die. He didn't want to die, indeed, but he preferred to follow Christ. He would rather follow Christ than avoid dying. If a way had been open to him by which he could follow Christ without dying, who can doubt that that is the chance he would have snatched at, that is what he would have chosen? But there was no way by which he could follow Christ to where he wished to go, except the one he did not wish to endure.

Finally, once the rams had passed along that harsh road of death, the sheep followed. The rams of the sheep are the holy apostles. The way of death is harsh, full of thorns; but with Peter and Paul passing along it, these thorns have been worn down by petrine, rocky feet.

*Life is to be loved, but life is also to be chosen*

4. We are not blaming anyone, not finding fault, even if this life is loved. But at least let this life be loved in such a way that for love of it you don't commit sin. Let life be loved, but let life be chosen. I question the lovers of life, and I say, *Who is the one who desires life?* Even by your silence, you all reply, "Who

is the one who does not desire life?" I now add what the psalm added; *Who is the one who desires life, and loves to see good days?* (Ps 34:12). The answer comes, "Who is the one who does not desire life, and does not love to see good days?"

So if you wish to enter into life (Mt 19:17), and to see good days, as that is the reward, pay attention to the work it's the reward of: *Keep your tongue from evil*. That's what follows in the psalm; *Who is the one who desires life, and loves to see good days?* He adds, *Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking trickery; turn aside from evil and do good* (Ps 34:13-14). Now say, "I desire it." I was asking you, "Do you desire life?" You were answering, "I do." *Curb your tongue from evil*. Now say, "I do desire it." *Turn aside from evil and do good*. Say, "I do desire it." But if you really do desire it, seek out the work, and you are hurrying to the reward.

*How the apostle Paul earned his crown*

5. Turn your attention to the apostle Paul, because it is also his feast today. They both led lives of harmony and peace, they shed their blood in companionship together, together they received the heavenly crown, they both consecrated this holy day. So turn your attention to the apostle Paul, call to mind the words which we heard a short while ago, when his letter was being read. *I, he said, am already being sacrificed, and the time for me to cast off is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith. For the rest, he says, there remains for me the crown of justice, which the Lord will award me on that day, the just judge* (2 Tm 4:6). He will not, after all, deny him his due, seeing that he granted him what was not his due. The just judge will award the crown, he certainly will; you see, he has someone to award it to. *I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith*; he will award the crown to these merits; and as I said, he will not deny him his due, seeing that he granted him what was not his due.

What is the thing he granted him that was not due to him? *I who was previously a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and a hurler of insults* (1 Tm 1:13). So what did he grant that was not his due? Let's listen to him making his own confession, and in his confession about his life praising the giver of grace. So was it your due that you should be an apostle? What was due to a blasphemer and a persecutor and a hurler of insults? What else, but eternal damnation? And what did he receive in place of eternal damnation? *I obtained mercy, because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief* (1 Tm 1:13). It's this mercy God granted him that was not his due.

Listen to another thing he says in another place: *I am not worthy, he says, to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God*.

"So I can see, apostle, that you were not worthy. How come that you should be worthy? So why are you what you are not worthy to be?"

Listen: *But by the grace of God I got to be what I am*. It was for my punishment that I was what I was; by the grace of God I am what I am. *By the*



*grace of God, he says, I am what I am; and his grace in me has not been void, but I have labored more than all of them.*

“So have you paid God back for his grace? Have you received something and paid for it? Notice what you said.”

I notice it, he says. *Not I, however, but the grace of God with me* (1 Cor 15:9-10). So will the just God deny the crown that is his due to this hard-working apostle, fighting the good fight, completing the course, keeping the faith, having granted him the grace that was not his due?

*Our merits are God's gifts*

6. But to whom will he award the crown that is due, little Paul,<sup>9</sup> great Paul, to whom will he award it? To your merits, of course. You have fought the good fight, completed the course, kept the faith; he will award the crown to these merits of yours. But for your crown to be awarded you, your merits are God's gifts. There you are, you have fought the good fight, completed the course. After all, you have seen *another law in your members, fighting back against the law of your mind, and taking you prisoner under the law of sin which is in your members*; how will you overcome, except by what follows? *Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Rom 7:23-25). There you have what you fought with, there's what you worked hard with, there's what kept you from failing, there's what gave you the victory.

Look at him fighting: *Who will separate us from the charity of Christ? Tribulation, or distress, or hunger, or persecution, or nakedness, or the sword? As it is written: That for your sake we are being put to death all day long, we have been counted as sheep for the slaughter.* There you have weakness, toil, wretchedness, dangers, trials. How can those struggling win the victory? Listen to what follows: *But in all these things we have been more than victorious through him who loved us* (Rom 8:35-37).

“You've completed the course; but under whose direction, whose guidance, with whose help? What do you say to this?”

I have completed the course, he says; but *this comes not from the one who wills, or the one who runs, but from God who has mercy* (Rom 9:16).

“You have kept the faith, it's true. First of all, which faith? One you gave yourself? Is what you said untrue, *As God has allotted to each one the measure of faith* (Rom 12:3)? Aren't you addressing certain fellow contestants of yours, who are toiling away and running with you in the stadium of this life, and aren't you saying to them, *But to you it has been granted for Christ's sake.* What has been granted? *Not only to believe in him, but also to die for him* (Phil 1:29).”

There you are; each thing has been granted, both to believe and to suffer for Christ.

*Unless the Lord keeps watch over the city,  
they labor in vain who guard it*

7. But someone, perhaps, will say, "I did indeed receive faith, but it is I who have guarded and kept it." You perhaps say this, whoever you are, listening to all this and having no sense: "I received faith, but it is I who have guarded and kept it"; it's not what our Paul says, "It is I who have guarded and kept it." He had his eyes, you see, on, *Unless the Lord keeps watch over the city, he labors in vain who guards it* (Ps 127:1). Labor, by all means, guard it; but it is good for you that you are being guarded. Because you are not up to guarding yourself. If you're left to yourself, you will doze off and fall asleep. *He, though, does not doze nor sleep, the one who guards Israel* (Ps 121:4).

*People want everything to be good, except themselves  
and their own lives*

8. So we love life, and we have no hesitation at all about loving life; nor can we in the least deny that we love life. So let us choose life, if we love life. What are we choosing? Life. First of all, here, a good one; after this one, the eternal kind. First of all, here, a good one, but not yet a blessed one. Lead a good one here, and a blessed one is being kept for you later. A good life is the work, a blessed one the reward. Lead a good one, and you will receive a blessed one. Could anything be fairer, anything a better arrangement than that? Where are you, lover of life? Choose a good one. If you were wanting a wife, you would only want a good one. You love life, and you choose a bad one? Tell me, what bad thing do you ever want? Whatever you want, whatever you love, you want it good. Obviously, you don't want a bad horse, a bad slave, a bad coat, a bad estate, a bad house, a bad wife, bad children. You're looking for them all to be good; be good yourself while you're on the lookout for them. How have you offended yourself, that among all the things you want to be good, you want yourself alone to be bad? You value your estate highly, your wife, your coat, and to come to the bottom line, your boots; and do you hold your own soul cheap?

Certainly this life is full of toil, hardship, trials, temptations, misery, grief, pain; fears of all sorts this life is full of. Certainly it's obvious that it's full of all these evils. And yet, full though it is like this of all evils, if anyone were to give it to us to last eternally, just as it is, how profuse our thanks would be, just so that we could be miserable for ever! That's not what's promised us, not by any kind of man, but by the true God. Truth, the real Truth, is promising us life which is not only eternal but also blessed; where there's no nuisance to annoy, no toil, no fear, no grief. What you find there is full and total definitive freedom from all anxiety. Life under God, life with God, life coming from God, life which is God himself. Such is the life which is promised us for eternity; and to that you think temporal life, and this one in fact, that is this wretched and dreary one, is to be preferred?

I'm asking you, is it to be preferred or not? It is preferred, when you want to

commit murder in order not to die. You're afraid, you see, your slave may kill you, and so you kill your slave. You're afraid your wife may kill you, about whom perhaps you entertain false suspicions; and you are eager to put your wife away, and make an adulterous marriage with another woman. There you have examples of how to lose life by loving life. You have preferred temporal to eternal life, a miserable life to a blessed one. And what have you found for your pains? Perhaps while you are preserving your life like this, you unwillingly breathe your last. You haven't the slightest idea when you are going to leave here. With what a bold face are you going out to meet Christ? With what impudence are you objecting to your punishment? I don't say, with what impudence are you demanding a reward; you will be condemned to eternal death if you choose temporal life, and by that choice indicate that you don't think much of everlasting life.

*Listen to me: let God deliver you from yourself*

9. But you don't listen to advice. You're seeking life, seeking good days. It's a good thing you're seeking, but it's not here. This particular precious stone has its own proper region, it is not to be found here. However hard you work at digging and mining, you won't find here what isn't here. But do what's commanded, and what you love will be given you in return. I mean, look, however long this life may be, will you ever find good days here? Notice what he added: *Life and good days* (Ps 34:12); in case it should be life, and it should be miserable because of bad days. There are plenty of bad days here; but bad days are not made by this sun, which runs its course coming from east to west, and goes on to another day. Bad days, brothers and sisters, are made by us. If we lived all days well, even here we would have good days.

Where, after all, does evil come to man from, but from man? Count how many evils people suffer from outwardly. Those that are not evidently caused by other people are extremely few. Of evils coming to man from man there are plenty. Thefts come from man, adultery with his wife he suffers from a man, his slave is suborned by a man, he's hoodwinked by a man, he's outlawed by a man, he's overthrown by a man, he's taken prisoner by a man. *Deliver me, Lord, from the evil man* (Ps 140:1).

Now you there, listening to me, whoever you are, you only think about your enemy, whom you endure as a bad neighbor, as a powerful figure, as a colleague, as a fellow citizen. Perhaps you think of a bandit, when you hear, *Deliver me, Lord, from the evil man*; and that's how you pray, when you do pray, that God may deliver you from the evil man, from this or that enemy of yours. Don't you be evil to yourself. Hear what I'm saying: may God deliver you from yourself. When God, you see, by his grace and mercy, makes you into a good person from a bad one, what is he making you good from, what is he delivering you from, if not from yourself, an evil man? Absolutely, my brothers and sisters, this is true, this is certain, this is definite: if God delivers you from yourself, an evil man, then whoever else may be an evil man, he will do you no harm at all.

*The example of Paul, delivered from his evil self*

10. Let me give you an example of the point we're dealing with, from the apostle Paul himself, the day of whose martyrdom we are celebrating. He was a persecutor, a blasphemer, a hurler of insults. He was a bad man; he was his own punishment, his own worst enemy. Well, here he is, breathing out slaughter and thirsting for the blood of Christians, though he was one day going to shed his own, carrying letters from the chief priests, to the effect that whatever followers of the Christian way he might find in Damascus, he should bring them back in chains, to be punished;<sup>10</sup> he was following the road of cruelty, knowing nothing about the road of kindness, when suddenly he heard from above the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ, saying from heaven, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick back at the goad* (Acts 26:14). Struck down by this voice, he was laid low as a persecutor, and pulled to his feet as a preacher; he was blinded in the flesh, so that he might see in his heart; enlightened in the flesh, so that he might preach from the heart.<sup>11</sup>

What does it look like, brothers and sisters? Saul was delivered from the evil man; from whom, but from Saul himself? Therefore, since he was delivered from the evil man who was himself, what could any other evil man do to him? They are the words of the apostle Peter: *And who will harm you, if you are lovers of the good?* (1 Pt 3:13). As a bad man he persecuted, as a bad man he stoned to death, as a bad man he beat with rods; to crown it all, as a bad man he arrested, bound, dragged off, put to death. For every evil thing he did, God prepared a good thing in return, so that whatever he later suffered himself, it was not the torment of punishment, but the occasion for a victor's crown. Just see what it is to be delivered from the evil man, that is from oneself. *Who, he says, will harm you, if you are lovers of the good?*

*The sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us*

11. "But look here, evil men do do harm; they did so many things to you, Paul."

Paul answers you, "I needed to be delivered from the evil man, that is from myself. But for the rest, what can these evil men do to me? *The sufferings of this time are not to be compared with the future glory that will be revealed in us* (Rom 8:18). *For indeed the light load of our tribulation is working, to a degree that defies belief, an eternal weight of glory for us, since we do not look to the things that can be seen. For the things that can be seen are temporary; while the things that are not seen are eternal* (2 Cor 4:17-18)."

You really were delivered from the evil man, that is from yourself, so that other evil men would not do you any damage, but would rather be to your advantage.

So then, dearly beloved, these saints struggled against sin to the shedding of their blood, and overcame by the grace and assistance of their Lord; let us celebrate their feast day in such a way that we love them; love them in such a

way that we imitate them; so that having imitated them, we may deserve to attain to their rewards.

### NOTES

1. Fischer and Kunzelmann actually suggest between 416 and 420. The sermon clearly comes from what might be called Augustine's high Pelagian period.

2. See Jn 21:22.

3. See Lk 22:62.

4. See Lk 22:56; Jn 21:15.

5. Reading, for all three verbs, *formidabas, negabas, plorabas*, instead of the text's future tense, *formidabis, negabis, plorabis*. Augustine's standpoint is the scene in Jn 21, when all that was in the past, not the scene of Peter's declarations in Lk 22 and Jn 13. This, however, may have been the stenographer's instinctive stance.

6. The point he is concentrating on is that, when Peter came to be martyred, he still would not wish to die, in spite of the example of Christ's resurrection, which proved that death is not something to be feared. This is not, perhaps, very obvious from the way he sets about it.

7. In the eucharistic prayer, or canon of the Mass.

8. That is, for denying Christ.

9. An allusion to the meaning of the name Paul. See Sermons 77, 3, note 7; 168, 7; 279, 5; 295, 7.

10. See Acts 9:1-2.

11. See Acts 9:8-18.

## SERMON 298

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

Date: 428<sup>1</sup>

*The feast of the apostles should be celebrated with even greater enthusiasm than those of other martyrs*

1. Really, we should have been celebrating the feast of such great martyrs, that is of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, with a much bigger crowd than this. After all, if we flock in big crowds to the celebration of the birthdays of lambs, how much more should we do so for those of the rams?<sup>2</sup> About the faithful, you see, whom the apostles have won by their preaching, it is written, *Bring the Lord the sons of rams* (Ps 29:1<sup>3</sup>). That the faithful might be able later to run the gauntlet of their sufferings, passing along a road full of thorns, through the distress and tribulations of persecution, they had the apostles to lead them. The blessed Peter, first of the apostles, the blessed Paul, last of the apostles, who appropriately worshiped the one who said, *I am the first, and I am the last* (Rv 1:17), met one another as the first and the last on one and the same day of their martyrdom.

Peter was one of those who ordained Saint Stephen. When the martyr Stephen was ordained deacon, the apostle Peter ordained him together with the other apostles.<sup>4</sup> Peter ordained him, Paul persecuted him. But don't let's inquire into Paul's early career, let us rather rejoice in the last years of the last apostle. I mean, if we are inquiring into previous matters, not even Peter's past will prove all that satisfactory. We have said Paul persecuted Stephen; let's take a look back at Peter denying the Lord. Peter washed out his denial of the Lord with his tears, Paul expiated his persecution of Stephen with blindness. Peter wept before being scourged, Paul even endured being scourged.<sup>5</sup> Both good men, holy, utterly devoted; their letters are recited to Christian peoples every day. And to which peoples, and to how many peoples? Think of the psalm: *Their sound has gone forth into all the world, and their words to the ends of the whole wide world* (Ps 19:4). We are even proof of this ourselves; to us too these words have come, and roused us from sleep, and converted us from the madness of unbelief to the sanity of faith.

*Augustine's disappointment at the smallness of his congregation*

2. I'm saying all this, dearly beloved, happy indeed to be enjoying such a great feast as this today, but a little sad, all the same, because I don't see such a big congregation of the faithful as ought to have gathered for the birthday celebration of the martyrdom of the apostles. If we didn't know when it was, we wouldn't be blamed for it; but if it's something nobody is unaware of, what's behind such laziness, such indifference? Don't you love Peter and Paul? It's those who are not here, of course, whom I'm addressing in you; to you, I mean, I'm grateful, because you at least have come.

And can there be any Christian spirit that does not love Peter and Paul? If you're still cold about them, read them and love them; if you still don't love them, may you get an arrow of the word in your heart. It's about the apostles, you see, that it says, *Your arrows are sharp, most mighty one*<sup>6</sup> (Ps 45:5); arrows which brought about what comes next: *Peoples will fall beneath you*. Wounds such as that are good; the wound of love is health-giving. The bride of Christ sings in the Song of Songs, *I am wounded with charity* (Sg 2:5; 5:8). When is this wound healed? When our desire is sated with good things.<sup>7</sup> It's called a wound as long as we desire, and don't yet have. Love, you see, in that case, is the same as if it were a pain. When we get there, when we have what we desire, the pain disappears, the love doesn't cease.

*Paul's longing to cast off and be with Christ*

3. You heard the words in Paul's letter, which he wrote to his disciple the blessed Timothy: *I indeed am already being set apart as victim*<sup>8</sup> (2 Tm 4:6). He could see his martyrdom hanging over him; he could see it, but he wasn't afraid of it. Why wasn't he afraid? Because he had already said, *Having the urge to cast off and be with Christ* (Phil 1:23). *I indeed*, he says, *am already being set apart as victim*. Nobody says he is going to dine and have a big banquet, with such enormous gusto as this man says he is going to suffer. *I indeed am already being set apart as victim*. What's *I'm being set apart as victim*? I shall be a sacrifice. Whose sacrifice? God's; because *precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints* (Ps 116:15). *I*, he says, *am being set apart as victim*. I'm not worried; I have a priest up above to offer me to God. I have as priest the very one who was previously the victim for my sake. *I am already being set apart as victim, and time presses for me to cast off* (2 Tm 4:6). What he meant was, to cast off and be released from the body.

You see, there is a very nice mooring rope of the body, and a person's tied up with it, and doesn't want to be released. This man, however, who was saying, *Having the urge to cast off and be with Christ*, was thankful that these ropes were some time or other to be cast off; the ropes of our fleshly members to be cast off, and the garments and ornaments of eternal vigor to be received. He had no qualms about laying aside the flesh, as he was going to receive a crown.<sup>9</sup> A happy exchange, a holy transfer, to what a blessed abode! Faith can see it, but not yet the eyes; because *neither has eye seen, nor ear heard, nor has it come*

up into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9).

Where are these saints, do you suppose? Where all is well with them. Why inquire any further? You don't know the place, but think of what earned it for them. Wherever they are, they are with God. *The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment will touch them* (Wis 3:1). But to the place without torment they passed through torments; to the spacious wide open spaces they came through some very tight spots. So if you are longing for such a home country, you shouldn't be afraid of a difficult and toilsome road. *Time*, he says, *presses for me to cast off. I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith; for the rest there remains for me a crown of justice* (2 Tm 6:4-8). You are right to be in such a hurry, right to rejoice at the prospect of being set apart as a victim; after all, there is awaiting you a crown of justice. The bitterness of suffering is still hanging over him, but his thoughts as he waits to suffer go beyond that, and he thinks of what there is beyond; not of how he's going, but of where he's going. And because he is thinking with great love of where he's going, he treads with great courage the road by which he's going.

*Previously grace was granted, now what is due is being awarded*

4. But when he said, *There remains for me a crown of justice*, he added, *which the Lord will award me on that day, the just judge* (2 Tm 4:8). He will make a just award, he didn't make one earlier on. Because if, my dear Paul, to begin with Saul, when you were persecuting the saints of Christ, when you were holding the garments of those who were stoning Stephen, if the Lord had delivered a just judgment upon you, where would you be now? For a crime of such enormity as yours, what place would be found for you at the very bottom of gehenna? But he didn't make a just award then, so that he might make one now. You see, we read your own words about your previous doings in your letter, and it's from you that we know about it. You said yourself, *For I am the last of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle* (1 Cor 15:9). You're not worthy, and he did it. So he didn't award you what was your due, because he bestowed an honor upon an unworthy man, whose due was punishment.

*I am not*, he said, *worthy to be called an apostle*.

Why not?

*Because I persecuted the Church of Christ*.

So if you persecuted the Church of Christ, how is it you are an apostle?

*But by the grace of God I am what I am*. Previously grace, now your due; previously grace was granted, now what is due is being awarded.

*By the grace of God*, he says, *I am what I am*. I myself am nothing. Whatever I am, I am by the grace of God. Whatever I am; but now I am an apostle; as for what I was, I was that on my own. *By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace has not been idle in me; but I have worked harder than all of them*.

What's this, apostle Paul? You seem to have been preening yourself; this looks as if it was spoken out of a certain swagger. So admit it.



I do admit it, he says: *Not I, however, but the grace of God within me* (1 Cor 15:9-10). He hadn't forgotten, but the last of the apostles was keeping for the last what would bring us joy at last: *Not I, however, but the grace of God within me*.

*It is God who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ*

5. It wasn't a just award at that time; what about now?

*I have fought the good fight,<sup>10</sup> I have completed the course, I have kept the faith; for the rest there remains for me a crown of justice, which the Lord will award me on that day, the just judge* (2 Tm 4:7-8).

You have fought a good bout; but who ensured you would win? I read you to yourself, and it's you who say, *I give thanks to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Cor 15:57). What would be the good of fighting, if you couldn't win? So you have to your credit that you fought, but it was Christ who gave you the victory. Carry on to the next point.

*I have completed the course.*

This too, who did it in you? Didn't you say yourself, *No thanks to the one who wills, or the one who runs, but to God who has mercy* (Rom 9:16)? Tell us what follows.

*I have kept the faith.*

This too, where did you get it from? Listen to your own words. *I obtained mercy, you say,<sup>11</sup> that I should be faithful* (1 Cor 7:25). So you kept the faith by God's mercy, not by your own strength. So for the rest *there remains for you a crown of justice, which the Lord will award you on that day, the just judge* (2 Tm 4:8). He will award it, after all, to your merits, that's why we can say he's the just judge. But even here don't start swaggering, because your merits are his gifts.

What I've been saying to him I have learned from him, and you of course have learned it with me in this school. I preside in this higher place, because I have to make the speech; but in this one school we all have a common master and teacher in heaven.

## NOTES

1. More vaguely, Lambot and Perler date the sermon to between 426 and 430. But it is one of a collection of nine which Lambot establishes were all preached in Hippo Regius between 19 June and the beginning of July in the same year. The others, in the order in which they were preached, are Sermons 286, 79, 73, 85, 287, this one, 92, 94, and 319. See O. Perler, *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin*, page 377, note 7.

2. The lambs are all the other martyrs, the rams are the apostles. But if within the last ten days he has already preached five sermons to the faithful of Hippo Regius, including possibly two on the

feast of Saint John the Baptist, it is perhaps not surprising that their appetite for such celebrations was becoming rather jaded.

3. Quite different in the Hebrew and modern English translations: “glory and strength” instead of “the sons of rams.”

4. See Acts 6:5-6.

5. See 2 Cor 11:24-25. For the other allusions see Lk 22:54-62; Acts 7:58—8:1; 9:8-9.

6. Reading *potentissime* with one recent edition, instead of *potentissimae*—your arrows are sharp, very potent—with the Maurists.

7. See Ps 103:5,

8. *Immolor*; this was a preparatory rite in pagan Roman sacrifices, which consisted of sprinkling the head of the victim with sacred meal before it was slaughtered. The Greek has a word which means being poured out as a libation.

9. A *coronam* in place of *carnem*; a nice play on words—but where would the crown be placed?

10. This is lacking in the text; but from his first comment it is apparent that he said it, or at least intended to say it. Either he was distracted, and thought he had said it, when in fact he hadn't, or else the stenographer's attention was distracted, and he thought he had noted it, when he hadn't. In either case, I think it's appropriate to supply it.

11. Reading *inquis*, instead of the text's *Inquit*. He is still having his conversation with Paul.

## SERMON 299

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

Date 418<sup>1</sup>

*The preacher incapable of satisfying the congregation's expectations,  
and praising these two preachers as they deserve*

1. It is quite certain that no words of ours will suffice to pronounce the praises of these preachers, and such great preachers too, about whom we have been hearing and singing that *their sound has gone forth into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the whole wide world* (Ps 19:4). We owe them our devotion, but we cannot fulfill your expectation. After all, what you are expecting from me today is to pronounce the praises of the apostles Peter and Paul, whose feast day it is. I acknowledge what you are expecting; and in acknowledging it, I give in. I mean, I can see what is expected, and from whom. But because their God is good enough to be praised by all of us, I trust his servants will not be too proud to have their praises proclaimed by those who are at your service.

*Peter the first of the apostles, Paul the last, joined together by God,  
who is "the first and the last"*

2. As you know, all of you who know the holy scriptures, among the disciples whom the Lord chose while present in the flesh, Peter was the first to be chosen. Paul on the other hand was not chosen among them, nor with them, but a long time afterward, though not for all that unequal to them. So Peter is the first of the apostles, Paul the last; while God, whose servants these two are, whose heralds, whose preachers these two are, is *the first and the last* (Rv 22:13). Peter first among the apostles, Paul last among the apostles; God both first and last, before whom nothing and after whom nothing. So God who has presented himself as eternally the first and the last, himself joined together the first and the last apostles in martyrdom.

Both their martyrdoms are celebrated in unison, both their lives harmonize in charity. *Their sound has gone forth into all the earth, and their words have echoed to the ends of the whole wide world* (Ps 19:4). Where they were chosen, where they preached the gospel, even where they suffered, we all know these

things. But how do we come to know them themselves, if not because *their sound has gone forth into all the earth?*

*Paul sees his imminent death as a sacrifice; we are all pledged by Christ's shedding of his blood to offer ourselves in sacrifice*

3. We heard Paul making a forecast about his already imminent and approaching death, when his letter was read: *As for me, I am already being immolated, and time presses for me to cast off. I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith; for the rest there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which God will award me on that day, the just judge; and not only me, he says, but all who love his being manifested* (2 Tm 4:6-8). Let me say something about this; I am helped, you see, by their words, which have gone out to the ends of the whole wide world. Notice first of all his holy act of devoting himself.<sup>2</sup> He said he was being immolated,<sup>3</sup> not that he was dying; not because one who is immolated doesn't die, but not everyone who dies is immolated. So being immolated is dying for God. The word is taken from sacrifice. Everything that is sacrificed is slaughtered for God.

The apostle understood, you see, to whom his blood was owed in martyrdom; he had become a debtor owing his blood, because the blood of his Lord had been shed for him. That one man, Christ, shed his blood, and pledged us all to do the same. As many of us as receive that trust,<sup>4</sup> owe what we receive; and this because he has been good enough to make us both debtors and payers of our debts. Which of us, after all, so poor and needy as we are in our weakness, is capable of paying what we owe such a creditor? But as it is written, *the Lord will give the word in much strength to those who proclaim the good news* (Ps 68:11); the word with which to be publicly defamed,<sup>5</sup> the strength with which to suffer. So he provided himself with his own victims, he himself dedicated the sacrifices to himself, himself filled the martyrs with the Spirit, himself equipped the confessors with strength. It's to them that he said, *For it is not you who are speaking* (Mt 10:20).

So although he is going to suffer, although he is going to shed his blood for the faith of Christ, he rightly says, nevertheless, *With what shall I repay the Lord for all that he has lavished on me?* And what is it that occurs to him? *I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord* (Ps 116:12-13). You were thinking about repaying, you were asking what you should repay with; and what occurs to you, on the point it seems of repaying, is, *I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord*. Were you really going to repay? But look, you're taking. So what you're taking, because you received what you would owe, you're taking to pay back with. A debtor when you received, a debtor when you pay back. I mean, *With what shall I repay?* is what he said. *I will take the cup of salvation*. So this too you receive, the cup of suffering, the cup about which the Lord said, *Can you drink the cup which I am going to drink?* (Mk 10:38).

But look, the cup is already in your hand, your martyrdom is already hanging over you. What are you doing in order not to lose your nerve? What are you

doing in order not to totter and stagger in your resolve? What are you doing to make sure you can drink what you are carrying?

“What am I doing?” he says. There too I will take, I will receive; I will be a debtor, because *I will call upon the name of the Lord*.

*I*, he says, *am already being immolated*. He had been assured of this by revelation; human weakness, I mean to say, wouldn't dare to promise itself this. His confidence came not from himself, but from the one who gave him everything, whom he had in mind when he said previously, *For what do you have that you have not received?* (1 Cor 4:7). So *I*, he said, *am already being immolated, and time presses for me to cast off. I have fought the good fight*. Question his conscience; he doesn't hesitate, because he is boasting in the Lord. *I have fought*, he says, *the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith*. You're quite right, you have completed the course, because you have kept the faith. *For the rest*, he says, *there remains for me a crown of justice, which the Lord will award me on that day, the just judge* (2 Tm 4:6-8).

*Do we really desire Christ's appearing in judgment?*

4. And in case he should seem to be excessively boastful, as though he were the only one, and to be laying claim to the Lord as exclusively his own: *Not only, though, to me*, he said, *but to all those who love his being manifested* (2 Tm 4:8). There was no better or shorter way in which he could suggest what people ought to do, in order to earn that crown of justice. Not all of us, you see, should expect to shed our blood; there are few martyrs, but many believers. Are you unable to be immolated, like Paul? You can keep the faith; by keeping the faith you love his being manifested. I mean, if you are afraid of the Lord coming, you don't love his being manifested. The Lord Christ is now in concealment; he will be openly manifested in his own time, when it is only just that, having been accused before a judge unjustly, he will himself be the judge.

He is going to come; and how is he going to come? In order to pass judgment. Not to be judged again, you see, but clearly now in order to pass judgment, as we know, as we believe, on the living and the dead. I'm asking each and every one of you, your eyes fixed on me in order to hear me. I'm asking; you should answer not me but yourself: Do you want this judge to come?

“I do,” you say.

Notice what you're saying; if what you're saying is true, if you really want him to come, think of how he will come upon you and find you. It's as judge, you see, that he's going to come. You have already been presented with humility, what's coming next is authority. He is not going to come, you see, in such a way as to clothe himself with a body, to be born of a mother, to suck her breasts, to be wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger; finally as now a young man to be mocked, arrested, scourged, hanged, to keep silent when he's judged. In case, perhaps, the reason you are looking forward to his coming, is that you still think he is going to come in lowliness.

He kept quiet while being judged; he will not keep quiet when he judges.

Here he was concealed, so that he wouldn't be recognized. *For if they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory* (1 Cor 2:8). So then, since his full authority was still concealed here, he kept silent in the face of another authority; but what we are looking forward to the coming of, is entirely the opposite of such concealment and silence. *God, you see, will come openly.* The one who first came secretly will come openly. There you have the opposite to that concealment; here's the opposite of that silence: *Our God will come, and he will not keep silent* (Ps 50:3). He kept silent while he was concealed, because *he was led like a sheep to be immolated.* He kept silent while he was concealed, because *like a lamb, voiceless before the one shearing it, just so he did not open his mouth.* He kept silent while he was concealed, because *in humility his judgment was taken away* (Is 53:7-8). He kept silent while he was concealed, because he was thought to be only a man. But as *God he will come openly; our God, and he will not keep silent.* So what about you, who were saying, "I want him to come"?

"I want him to come," you say.

Let him come, aren't you afraid yet? *Fire will go before him* (Ps 50:3). If you're not afraid of the judge, what about the fire?

*To those who keep the faith and truly love his being manifested the crown of justice is not simply given, it's their due*

5. But if you keep the faith, really love his being manifested, you should be looking forward to the crown of justice without the least anxiety; to people like that, you see, it's not just granted, it's their due. I mean, even the apostle Paul himself demands it as his due: *Which the Lord, he says, will award me on that day, the just judge* (2 Tm 4:8). He will award it, because he's just; he made himself my debtor by his promise. He commanded, I heeded; he proclaimed the gospel, I believed. *I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course,<sup>6</sup> I have kept the faith.* That's what he's given you. It is to these gifts that he owes the promised crown. That you are being immolated, that you are fighting the good fight, that you are keeping the faith, you have it all from him. *For what do you have that you have not received?* (1 Cor 4:7). But to these gifts, I repeat, he owes what he has promised. Before he gave such gifts, what was it that he owed to Paul?

*Christ came to save sinners*

6. Look at the apostle himself saying, *The word is faithful, and worthy of complete acceptance: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; nor did he hesitate to add,<sup>7</sup> of whom I am the foremost* (1 Tm 1:15). *Christ Jesus*, he says, that is, Christ Savior, *Salvator*. That, you see, is what Jesus means in Latin. Nor should the grammarians ask how good it is as Latin, but Christians should just ask how true it is. *Salus*, you see, is a Latin noun. But as for *salvare* and *salvator*, these weren't Latin words before the Savior came. When he came to Latin people, he coined these Latin words.

So *Christ Jesus*, Christ Savior, *came into the world.* And as though we asked

him, "Why?," he said, *to save sinners*. That's why Jesus came. Because to some extent we can also read in the gospel that that is how this name was interpreted and explained: *They will call his name Jesus; for he it is who will save his people from their sins* (Mt 1:21). Therefore *the word is worthy of complete acceptance, worthy of belief, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost*. Not because he was the first to sin, but because he sinned more than the rest. Just as we say, in the arts and professions, that he's the foremost doctor, younger than many, but ahead of them in his skill; he's the foremost smith, the foremost architect; we are in the habit of talking like that. That's how the apostle called himself the foremost sinner. Nobody, you see, persecuted the Church more ferociously.

So if you ask what was owed to the sinners to whom Jesus came, you won't find anything owing to them except punishment. If you inquire what was owing, it's punishment. If you ask what was paid, it's salvation; instead of punishment, salvation. Punishment was owing, salvation was paid over. A penalty was due, what was awarded was a crown. Nothing was owed Paul, previously Saul, foremost of sinners, surpassing the rest in cruelty, nothing was owed him but punishment, and heavy punishment too; and he's called from heaven, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* (Acts 9:4). He's coerced into sparing, so that he may be spared himself. The wolf is changed into a sheep; that's nothing, into a sheep; in fact, into a shepherd. By the voice from on high he's slain and brought to life, struck down and healed. What is this grace, but precisely grace? I mean, what meritorious goodness had preceded it? It's called grace, because given gratis, for nothing.

*Jesus, he says, came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But for this reason I obtained mercy* (1 Tm 1:15-16). Could he possibly have said then, *The Lord will award me on that day, the just judge* (2 Tm 4:8)? If the Lord is going to make an award to the foremost of sinners on that day, the just judge, what else will he award, but what is due to the foremost of sinners, the heaviest of punishments, eternal pains? That's what was previously owing, and it wasn't awarded. *For this reason, he says, I obtained mercy*. I didn't receive my due; *but I obtained mercy*, I the foremost of sinners, so that Christ Jesus might display in me all his long suffering, as a model for those who were going to believe in him unto eternal life (1 Tm 1:16). What's *as a model?* So that no villain, nobody caught up in criminal acts, should ever despair of pardon, seeing that Saul obtained it.

The great doctor, that is Jesus, the great doctor, on coming to the region of the sick, so that his medical skill might be widely publicized, chose precisely such a one to cure as was generally despaired of. So it's such a one, previously such a one, who now says, *I am already being immolated, and time presses for me to cast off. I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith*.

Were you that man who was rushing round furiously, who was dragging Christians to death, who when Stephen was being stoned kept the clothes of all who were doing it, so that you could stone him by the hands of them all?

“I was,” he says. “But I’m not.”  
 Why were you, and now are not?  
 “Because I obtained mercy.”

So then, Paul, you obtained what was not your due. Say now without the slightest anxiety, say now what is your due.

*For the rest there remains for me a crown of justice, which the Lord will award me on that day, the just judge (1 Tm 4:6-7).* How confidently he demands payment of his due, the man who was let off the punishment that was his due! Now say to your Lord, say it without a qualm, say it with certainty, say it brimming over with confidence: “Previously I was sunk deep in my ill-will; I profited by your entirely undeserved mercy; now crown your gifts with what I do deserve.”

That must be enough of that. Let’s move on to Peter; to him too let us pay, if not an eloquent tribute<sup>8</sup> that is worthy of him, at least our solemnly pledged devotion; moving from the last to the first, because we too are striving to move on to the first things from the last.

*The Lord showed Peter to Peter when he foretold he would deny him;  
 he showed Christ to Peter when he foretold how he would die for him*

7. To Saint Peter, first of the apostles, the Lord Jesus himself foretold how he would suffer, in the gospel which we heard when it was read just now, where he said, *When you were younger, you used to gird yourself and go where you wished; but when you have become an old man, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you, and carry you where you do not wish.* And the evangelist himself went on to explain to us what exactly had been meant: *But this, he says, the Lord said to indicate by what death he was going to glorify God (Jn 21:18-19).* The Lord Christ himself foretold his passion, his cross, but to a Peter now loving, not denying him.

The doctor, you see, observed each moment in him: how he denied when he was feeble, how he loved when he was in good health. The Lord showed him up, showed up Peter to this same Peter, when he had promised with a rash self-confidence that he was going to die for Christ, whereas Christ had come to die for Peter. *You will lay down your life for me?* he said. *Amen I tell you, before the cock crows, three times will you deny me (Jn 13:38).* I will heal you; but the first thing is for you to acknowledge that you are a sick man. So in foretelling that denial the Lord showed up Peter to Peter; while in that question about love, the Lord showed Christ to Peter. *Do you love me?* he said. *I do. Feed my sheep (Jn 21:15-17).* This once, this again, this a third time. Three times did love confess, three times was fear condemned. And because he now loved, he was shown how he would suffer. This, you see, is what loving meant, to go as far as suffering and death for love of Christ.



*Both Peter and Paul were willing and unwilling to die*

8. But what's this now, brothers and sisters? Who wouldn't be worried by this? *Another*, he says, *will gird you, and carry you where you do not wish* (Jn 21:18). So didn't Peter come willingly to such a great grace as martyrdom? Look at Paul: *For I am already being immolated, and time presses for me to cast off* (2 Tm 4:6). In these words he seems to be almost hurrying with relish to his martyrdom; while for this man, *Another will gird you, and carry you where you do not wish*. Paul willingly then, and Peter unwillingly? No, in fact, if we were to understand it correctly, Paul willingly and Peter willingly, and Paul unwillingly and Peter unwillingly. While I try to explain this as best I can, I have need of your close attention.

Death cannot be loved, it can be borne. I mean, if it is loved, those who submitted to it for the faith didn't do anything very great. If we saw them enjoying themselves in parties, we wouldn't call them great men, would we, wouldn't call them brave men? If we observed them wallowing in pleasures of all sorts, would we praise them for courage or patience? Why not? Because they were carrying on in a way contrary to grief, contrary to any inconvenience, enjoying themselves delightfully with all kinds of pleasure, would we, because they were like that, praise them as brave, as supremely patient men?

Well, that's not why we praise the martyrs. Great men, brave men, patient men. Do you want to convince yourself that all this is to be borne, not loved? Question the very name; it's called passion, suffering. So nature, not only human beings, but absolutely all living creatures too shun death and dread it. That's why the martyrs are great, because for the sake of the kingdom of heaven they bravely submitted to what is very hard indeed, and with their minds fixed on the promises they bore with the inconveniences. Consider the Lord saying, *Greater love has nobody than this, that one should lay down one's life for one's friends* (Jn 15:13). If this isn't hard, what's so great about what love is? That it's loving enjoyments for my sake? No; but that it's enduring death. *Because of the words from your lips*—it's the voice of the martyrs—*Because of the words from your lips*, that is, because of your warnings and promises, *I have kept to hard ways* (Ps 17:4).

So as far as the rule of nature and the force of custom is concerned, death is something to be shunned; but when what's coming after death is loved, what we do not wish is submitted to, so that we may reach what we do wish. There you have where this comes from: *Will carry you where you do not wish*. It was a declaration of his nature, not of his commitment. The Lord himself transferred this weakness of our nature<sup>9</sup> to himself, when he said to his Father on the brink of his passion, *Father, if it can be done, let this cup pass from me* (Mt 26:39). *As for me, I am already being immolated*, are the words of a man patiently enduring something, not of one reveling in it. So it's as a punishment that we have been given our death to drink. We, the spreading branches of the human race, have received this from the root. Adam was the first to earn it by sinning. *From a woman came the beginning of sin*, as scripture says, *and because of her we all die* (Sir 25:24). And, *Through one man sin entered into the world, and*

*through sin death; and thus it passed on to all men, in that all have sinned (Rom 5:12).*

So in our nature there's both fault and penalty. God made the nature without fault, and if it had persisted without fault, the penalty, of course, would not have followed either. That's where we have come from, that's where we have derived each thing from, and have as a result contracted many other evils. So then, in our nature there's both fault and penalty; in the flesh of Jesus there's also penalty without fault, so that both fault and penalty might be cured. *Another will gird you*, he says, *and carry you where you do not wish*. That's the penalty; but through the penalty you wend your way to the crown. Paul was making light of the penalty; so with his gaze fixed on the crown, he was making light of the penalty when he said, *I am already being immolated, there is due to me a crown of justice*. The way is hard along which one passes, but what one is passing along it to is great. Peter too was well aware of where he was wending his way to; that's why he submitted to his sufferings with complete commitment and devotion. But he bore with his martyrdom, he didn't love it. He bore with his martyrdom, he loved what was to follow, and since he loved where he was going, he bore with the way he was going along.

*Various proofs that Paul also was unwilling to die*

9. We have said that both were unwilling and both were willing; that both, if it could possibly have happened, were reluctant to undergo the penalty, while both, all the same, were equally enamored of the crown. But we have to show that Paul too was reluctant to undergo the penalty. The Lord himself, after all, stood as witness for Peter—because he also transposed you into himself, when he said, *Father, if it can be done, let this cup pass from me (Mt 26:39)*.<sup>10</sup> So the Lord testified to the fact for Peter; while Paul did so for himself. You see, he says somewhere about this mortal body, *We groan, being weighed down (2 Cor 5:4)*, according to what scripture says in another place, *The body that is perishing weighs down the soul, and the earthly dwelling presses down on the mind thinking many things (Wis 9:15)*. So he says, *We groan, being weighed down*, under the load, namely, of the perishable body. *We groan, being weighed down*.

So if you're groaning, gladly lay aside this load.

Certainly he said he was groaning under this burden, weighed down under this load of the perishable body; see whether he wishes to be stripped of this burden under which he is weighed down, under which he's groaning. That's not what follows; but what does he say, in fact? *Inasmuch as we do not wish to be stripped*. O voice of nature, admission of the penalty! The body weighs a lot, the body is burdensome, the body's perishable; one groans under it, and yet it is not gladly abandoned, not gladly laid aside. *We do not wish*, he says, *to be stripped*.

So are you going to stay like that, groaning? And if you're groaning under the weight, why don't you wish to be stripped?

No, he says<sup>11</sup>—notice what follows. *We do not wish to be stripped, but to be*

*clothed over on top* (2 Cor 5:4). I'm groaning under an earthly tunic, I'm hurrying toward a heavenly one. I want to receive that one, I don't want to lay aside this one. *Inasmuch as we do not wish to be stripped, but to be clothed over on top.*

So, Paul, let me understand you; what are you saying? It will be an insult, surely, to such a splendid heavenly garment as that, to come to you on top of these rags of perishable mortality, so that this is underneath, that on top; this inside, that outside.

God forbid, he says; that's not what I'm saying. I don't want to be stripped, but to be clothed over on top; not, however, so that the perishable is lurking under the imperishable, but that *what is mortal may be swallowed up by life* (2 Cor 5:4).

How right you were, those of you who know the scriptures, to sing out these words. But in case anybody ignorant of the scriptures should suppose they were my words I concluded with, they are Paul's words, the whole passage is the words of the apostle: *We groan, being weighed down, inasmuch as we do not wish to be stripped, but to be clothed over on top, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.* You're rightly holding to what you say elsewhere, speaking of the resurrection of the body: *This perishable thing must put on imperishability, and this mortal thing put on immortality. When, though, this perishable thing has put on imperishability, that is when the word that is written will come about: Death has been swallowed up in victory* (1 Cor 15:53-54). Death is nowhere; not below, not above, not within, not without. *Death has been swallowed up, you see, in victory. Where, death, is your striving?* is what will be said to death in the future resurrection of the body, and in such a transformation that death is swallowed up in victory. When this perishable thing has put on imperishability, they will say to death, *Where, death, is your striving?* This striving is what causes you to be carried where you do not wish. *Where, death, is your striving? Where, death, is your sting? Now the sting of death is sin* (1 Cor 15:55-56).

*Death caused by sin; against the Pelagians*

10. So does death really not come from sin? What other death was he talking about, after all, when he was talking about the resurrection of the body? This perishable thing will put on imperishability; death will be swallowed up in victory. That's the resurrection of the body. That's when they will say, *Where, death, is your striving?* To which death, if not that of the body? Because the discussion is about the resurrection of the body. *Where, death, is your striving? Where, death, is your sting? Now the sting of death is sin* (1 Cor 15:55-56). Sin is the sting of death, the sting by which death was caused, not the sting which was caused by death; as poison is a cup of death, because it causes death, not because it is caused by death.

So the Lord puts an end to this penalty with the resurrection; however, he also leaves death behind for both the faithful and the saints as something to

struggle with. Death has been left for you to wrestle with. Because God could have removed death from you when you were justified, but he left it for you to fight against, so that there might be something for you to make light of for the sake of the faith. Because he did do this with those for whom he wished to. Enoch was taken up, and Elijah was taken up,<sup>12</sup> and they are alive. Was it their justice that deserved this, or the grace of God, and a special concession and privilege from God? In order to demonstrate his power in all respects, the creator drew our attention to what he could do.

*The Pelagians cannot quote the cases of Enoch and Elijah to support their contention that death comes from nature, not from sin*

11. So it's in vain for these people, who say that as regards the death of the body, we don't die as a result of sin, but that it's natural for us to die, and that Adam would have died even if he hadn't sinned—it's in vain for them to challenge us with these two, Enoch and Elijah. They're talking very thoughtlessly indeed, and if they would only notice, they are talking against themselves. What are they saying, after all?

If death is the result of sin, why didn't Enoch and Elijah die?

Don't you see, whoever you are that say this, that you're saying death comes from nature, since you deny it comes from sin? You say, from nature. I say, from sin; yes indeed from nature, but from a nature already vitiated, already doomed to this penalty. Well then, you say the death of the body comes from nature, I say from sin.

And you question me: "If it's from sin, why didn't Enoch and Elijah die?"

And I answer, "Or rather, if it's from nature, why didn't Enoch and Elijah die?"

Enoch and Elijah are alive; they were taken up, wherever they are, they're alive. And if a certain inference of faith drawn from God's scripture is not mistaken, they are going to die.<sup>13</sup> The book of Revelation, you see, mentions two marvelous prophets, who are both going to die, and to rise again in the sight of men, and ascend to the Lord, and they are understood to be Enoch and Elijah, though their names aren't mentioned.<sup>14</sup> And if you perhaps, who know all about these things, haven't accepted this as scripture;<sup>15</sup> or if you do accept it, but make light of the point and say, "They aren't explicitly mentioned by name," let them stay alive, as you suppose, without their ever going to die; go on saying to me, "If death comes from sin, why didn't they die?" I put the ball back in your court: "If death comes from nature, why didn't they die?" I say, that in order for them to live, the fault was done away with; you must say, if you can, that nature was done away with.

*A warning not to be led astray by the arguments of the Pelagians*

12. We have been saying one thing after another, as occasion arose; but nonetheless it all concerns the stability of our faith against some people who

question it, whose numbers are unfortunately on the increase. But we must not let them overcome our patience, not in any case overturn our faith. Let us be watchful and on our guard against these new arguments, human ones of course, not divine. We are celebrating the feast of the apostles today; let's listen to the apostle's warning: *Shun profane novelties in words; for they easily lead to ungodliness* (2 Tm 2:16). *But we wish you to be wise indeed in the good, but untouched by evil* (Rom 16:19). Adam died, but that serpent isn't yet dead. He is whispering away, he never stops hissing his insinuations. The ultimate punishment is being reserved for him, but he's looking for companions in his damnation. Let's listen to the friend of the bridegroom, jealous for the bridegroom, not for himself: *For I'm jealous over you with the jealousy of God; I fitted you out for one man, to present you to Christ as a chaste virgin. And I am afraid*, he says, *that just as the serpent seduced Eve with his cunning, so your minds too may be corrupted from the chastity which is in Christ* (2 Cor 11:2-3).

We have all heard the words of the apostle, let us all observe them, all be on our guard against the serpent's poisons. I mean, we can't say, "We haven't heard, we don't know," when we've just been singing, *Their sound has gone forth into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the whole wide world* (Ps 19:4). Words that have run to the ends of the earth and come to us; we have received them, copied them out, appointed readers for them. The reader is not silent; the commentator gives birth to his ideas; why does the sly intruder never stop?

## NOTES

1. So Fischer and Kunzelmann. If they are right, it was in all probability preached in Carthage, and the opening section does suggest that there were other bishops present. The Maurists add to the title: "In which he argues against the heresy of the Pelagians."

2. *Sanctam devotionem*. He means it in the concrete sense, in which the Decii, two Roman consuls of the heroic days of the Republic, devoted themselves to death—to the *dii Manes*, the divine shades of the dead—to ensure victory for the Roman arms. He is saying that that is what Paul is doing here.

3. In the previous sermon I paraphrased this somewhat un-English word by "set apart as a victim." Here that does not seem feasible. See Sermon 298, note 8.

4. *Fides*. I think there is an allusion here to receiving the blood of Christ in the eucharist; *fides* meaning not only the faith by which we believe, but also the guarantee, the security, the credit that should obtain between debtor and creditor. "Trust" is not altogether adequate as a translation; "faith" would be even less so; I cannot think of a better one.

5. *Quo diffamentur*; it could mean just to be made widely known. But my guess is that he means it in the bad sense of being defamed, which is the preliminary stage leading up to arrest and the suffering of martyrdom. Thus it corresponds exactly to Saint Paul's saying he is already being immolated; immolation strictly being the preparatory rite of sprinkling the victim with sacrificial meal, before it is actually sacrificed. It is an extraordinary interpretation of a very obscure verse of a very difficult psalm.

6. From here to the beginning of section 6, as far as *of whom I am the foremost*, there is a hole in the only manuscript of this sermon, which belonged to the Abbey of Corbey. Only the first few words of the next ten lines survive. The reason, say the Maurists, is that “some good-for-nothing with too much time on his hands,” *quidam nebulo male feriatus*, liked the illuminated initial letter of the manuscript on the reverse side so much, that he hacked it out. I translate the text as reconstructed by both the Maurists and by Bossuet, with one small suggestion of my own. Here it is, with the surviving words all on the left of the page, before the slash /:

consummavi / , fidem servavi. Haec donavit.

His donis suis debet pro/ missam coronam. Quod immolaris, quod bonum / certamen certas, quod fidem servas, ab illo habes. Qu/ id enim habes quod non accepisti? Sed his, inquam / , donis suis debet promissa sua. Antequam talia don/ aret, quid erat quod Paulo deberet?

Vide ipsum apostol/ um dicentem: Fidelis sermo et omni acceptione dign/ us, quod Christus Jesus venit in mundum peccatores / salvos facere. Nec dubitavit addere, quorum primus ego sum.

7. From here onward the text is complete.

8. Translating *facultatem* as though it were the equivalent of *facunditatem*—or emending it to that.

9. Yet another reversed genitive; literally he says, “this nature of our weakness,” *hanc nostrae infirmitatis naturam*. It could also be translated “this weak nature of ours.”

10. And so, I think is the inference, he is not disparaging Peter when he testifies to his unwillingness to die.

11. In answer to the first question.

12. See Gn 5:24; 2 Kgs 2:11.

13. One of Augustine’s more shaky inferences, drawn in a literal-minded way from a text in the most non-literal-minded book of the whole bible. And an inference, I would have thought, that is clearly ruled out by several other texts of scripture.

14. See Rv 11:3-12. The probability is that the two figures John had in mind, in a highly symbolic capacity, were Moses, not Enoch, and Elijah. There is a Jewish apocryphal book called *The Assumption of Moses*. The writer in any case calls them witnesses, not prophets (though he does say they will prophesy), and several other things besides, such as two olive trees. It is likely that they represent the Church in its dual Christlike attributes of priesthood and kingship.

15. There were still people, and even whole local Churches, at this time who did not accept *Revelation* as divinely inspired canonical scripture.

## SERMON 299A

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

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

*Though they did not suffer in the same year, Peter and Paul suffered on the same date by a special divine providence*

1. Today has dawned as the birthday of the most blessed apostles Peter and Paul; not the birthday which entangled them in the world, but the one which set them free from the world. It is in virtue of human feebleness, of course, that people are born for distress; it is in virtue of Christian charity that martyrs are born for a crown. And it is on account of their merits that this day has become the occasion for us to celebrate their feast and imitate their holiness;<sup>2</sup> so that by recalling the glory of the martyrs we might love in them what those who slew them hated, and by loving their virtues, we might honor their sufferings. It was by their virtues that their merit was acquired, and by their sufferings that their reward was earned.

One day for two martyrs and two apostles; as far as we have gathered from the tradition of the Church, they did not suffer on one and the same day, and they did suffer on one and the same day.<sup>3</sup> Peter suffered first on this day, Paul suffered afterward on this day; their merits gave equal value to their sufferings, their charity united them on this day; this was brought about for them by the one who was in them, who was suffering in them, who was suffering with them, who was helping them as they fought, awarding them the crown when they won. And so let us hear about the merits of Peter from the gospel; let us hear about the merits of Paul from the apostle's letter.

The gospel was chanted just now, just now we heard, *The Lord said to Peter, Simon Peter, do you love me? And he answered, I do, Lord. And the Lord again: Feed my sheep* (Jn 21:15). He questions him a third time on exactly the same point as he has questioned him about twice. He made it his business to ask three times; Peter was already tired of answering a third time. *Peter was grieved, you see, so the gospel says, because the Lord asked him the question a third time, and said: Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you. And the Lord said: Feed my sheep* (Jn 21:17). Someone who asks a question he knows the answer to wants to teach something; so what did the Lord want to teach Peter

by asking a third time about what he knew already? What else can we suppose, brothers and sisters, but that charity should eliminate weakness, and that Peter should realize he had to confess a third time out of love, having denied three times out of fear?

It was Peter's merit, that he fed the Lord's sheep. Let us hear again what Paul's merit was. He was speaking to his disciple, to tell him about his own future martyrdom, and to save him from fear by his example: *I adjure you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and by his manifesting himself and by his kingdom; he bound him by adjuring him like that, and then added, Preach the word; press on, in season, out of season (2 Tm 4:1-2).*

*The Lord has taught us to think lightly of things that pass away,  
and to love things that last for ever*

2. When we hear this, we too<sup>4</sup> in our small measure are reasonable for those who are willing, unseasonable for those are reluctant. When you offer them bread you are reasonable for the hungry, unseasonable for the sick when you force them to eat. Food is offered the first, rammed down the second; nourishment is pleasing to the one sort, distasteful to the other, but loving concern neglects neither. So let us take the merits of the apostles as examples for ourselves, while as for their sufferings, let us not only not be afraid of them, but also, should it be necessary, share them.

Listen to what the same apostle has to say: *As for me, I am already being immolated (2 Tm 4:6).* Immolation is something to do with sacrifice;<sup>5</sup> he knew his martyrdom was a sacrifice to God. It was not the people who slew him that offered such a sacrifice to the Father, but the high priest who had said, *Do not fear those who slay the body (Mt 10:28).* *Time presses, he says, for me to cast off.*

So what, my dear Paul, are you hoping for when you cast off? What sort of rest and quiet, you tireless worker?

*Time presses, he says, for me to cast off.*

So what have you done? What are your hopes?

*I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith (2 Tm 4:6-7).* In what way did he keep the faith, except by not being frightened of his persecutors? *Preach the word in season, out of season (2 Tm 4:2).*

So how criminal it is on our part, when we are afraid, not to keep faith, particularly with the one who is teaching us both to love better things and to fear more dreadful things! However pleasant this life may sometimes be, it isn't paradise, it's not heaven, not the kingdom of God, not the company of the angels, not the fellowship of those citizens of the Jerusalem which is above. Let the heart be raised upward, the earth of the flesh<sup>6</sup> be trampled on. The Lord has taught us to make light of things that pass away, to love those that are eternal; he has taught us, he has cured us, and he goes on curing us, because such is his



pleasure. He didn't find us in good health, after all, but came to us in our sickness as a doctor. The cup of suffering is bitter, but it completely cures all diseases. The cup of suffering<sup>7</sup> is bitter, but the doctor drinks it first, in case the invalid should hesitate to drink it. So drink this cup, if you are given it by the one who knows what he is giving and to whom he is giving it. But if he doesn't want you to drink it, let him heal you some other way, provided he does heal you anyhow.

We, however, should put ourselves in the hands of such a great doctor without a qualm, absolutely sure that he is not going to prescribe anything that isn't good for us. Paul, you see, was claiming as his right what he was demanding as his due. And what right did he have to it? *I have completed the course, I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith.*

That's what you've done; what are you hoping for?

*For the rest there remains for me a crown of justice, which the Lord will award me on that day, the just judge (2 Tm 4:7-8).* He doesn't say, "gives," but "will award." If he awards it, he owed it. He owes a crown, he awards a crown; he put himself in our debt, not by our lending him anything, but by his promising us something. Don't imagine, after all, that when he was crowning Paul's merits, he wasn't crowning his own gifts.

## NOTES

1. No suggestion is offered about the date. From the style, and in spite of the brevity, I would place it fairly early on, about 400; and possibly somewhere other than Hippo Regius, or even Carthage.

2. This is, presumably, what this very oddly constructed sentence means: *Et hic dies . . . factus est nobis propositus ad celebrandi sollemnitatem et ad imitandi sanctitatem*; literally, "And this day . . . has become proposed to us for the solemnity of celebrating and the holiness of imitating"; or, ". . . for the solemnity of something to be celebrated, and the holiness of something to be imitated."

3. In different years, presumably.

4. Bishops, and clergy in general.

5. See Sermons 299, note 3; 298, note 8.

6. Reading *terra carnis* instead of the text's *terra carne*; let the earth be trampled on by the flesh.

7. He means in particular the suffering of martyrdom, of death for the faith, a cup which, as he goes on to imply, will not be given to everyone to drink.

## SERMON 299B

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

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

*Let love confess the one whom fear had denied*

1. The martyrdom of the blessed apostles has consecrated this day for us; it was by despising the world that they earned this renown throughout the whole world, Peter the first of the apostles, Paul the last of the apostles. The first and the last were brought to one and the same day for martyrdom by the First and the Last, by Christ. In order to grasp what I've said, turn your minds to Alpha and Omega. The Lord himself says plainly in the Apocalypse, *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first, before whom nobody; the last* (Rv 1:8.17), after whom nobody; preceding all things, setting a term to all things. Do you want to gaze upon him as the first? *All things were made through him* (Jn 1:3). Do you seek him as the last? *For the end of the law is Christ, unto justice for everyone who believes* (Rom 10:4). In order for you to live at some time or other, you had him as your creator; in order for you to live always, you have him as your redeemer.

Let us turn our eyes, dearly beloved, upon this first of the apostles, the most blessed Peter, telling us in his letter, *Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, so that we may follow in his steps* (1 Pt 2:21). And then you heard, when the gospel was read, *Follow me* (Jn 21:19). He questioned him, Christ did Peter, that is to say, the master the disciple, the Lord the servant, the doctor the patient now cured, and said to him, *Peter, do you love me?*; and as you know, he didn't just say *Do you love me*, but added *more than these?* Do you love me more than these, more than these do? He didn't answer, "I love you more than these do"; it wasn't, after all, the business of a man to pass judgment on the hearts of others. But he said in reply, *Lord, you know that I love you* (Jn 21:15). Why ask me about what you have caused in me? You know what you've given; why ask me about the love, which I only have from you? *You know that I love you.*

And the Lord again asked him exactly the same question, and Peter again gave exactly the same answer. The Lord asked the question a third time, *and Peter was hurt, because he said to him a third time, Do you love me?* (Jn 21:17). The Lord was questioning the love of Peter; let us question the hurt of Peter.

Why do we suppose Peter was hurt, because the Lord said to him a third time, *Do you love me?* However often the Lord wished to ask the question, why should the servant be hurt? But the third time the Lord asked the question, Peter recalled his third denial. You are aware, blessed Peter, you are aware of your desertion, in recalling it you are hurt; but after being hurt, rejoice. Let love confess the one whom fear had denied.

Finally, observe him as a lover, who had previously been a repudiator; or rather, previously a lover, but a weak one still. We say that Peter denied Christ, and we don't say that he followed Christ all through the dangers of his passion. The doctor was following the right order of the healing process; first he showed Peter to Peter, and later on he showed himself in Peter. As though he were saying to him, "You were presumptuously confident you would die for me, but not through confidence in me, because you were too confident in yourself. Questioned by the servant girl, you discovered yourself; you wept, and returned to me."

*More about Peter, and how at Pentecost too he showed himself to be  
the first of the apostles*

2. So now, when the Lord entrusted him with his sheep, he foretold his martyrdom, which we are celebrating today. *When you were younger*, he said, *you used to gird yourself, and walk where you wished; but when you get older, another will gird you, and carry you where you do not wish. But he said this, to indicate by what death he was going to glorify God* (Jn 21:18-19). It happened; Peter denied, Peter wept, Peter washed out his denial with his tears. Christ rose again, Peter was questioned about love; he had the sheep entrusted to him, not his own, but Christ's. After all, he didn't say to him "Feed your sheep," but *Feed my sheep* (Jn 21:17); feed the ones I bought, because I also bought back, also redeemed you as well.<sup>2</sup>

Then the Lord Christ spent forty days with his disciples; and as they looked on, a cloud received him, and he ascended into heaven. They accompanied his ascension with their eyes; they stayed afterward in the city, they received the Holy Spirit on the fiftieth day, they were filled; in that moment of time they learned the languages of all nations, they began to speak in them, to the wonder and amazement of those who had slain Christ. Then that repudiator, that lover, alone of them all because first among all of them, jumped up in front of the Jews, and began to proclaim the good news of Christ to the killers of Christ. He sowed in them the faith of Christ, and persuaded many of them to die for Christ, where he had been afraid himself of being slain by them for his sake.

*An explanation of Psalm 19, which had just been sung*

3. Where is it said, where is it foretold, that the apostles of Christ were going to speak with the tongues of all nations? *The heavens expound the glory of God; by heavens, understand those who carry God; and the firmament, that's the*

heavens, *proclaims the work of his hands*, that is, the glory of God. *Day to day belches the word, and night to night announces knowledge* (Ps 19:1-2). We must not keep quiet about Christ by day or by night. However, you can think of day belching the word to day as Christ doing it to his disciples, the light to the lights. And night to night announced knowledge; Judas announced to the Jews where Christ was. Christ was arrested, Christ was slain, death was slain in Christ, because Christ rose again, and ascended into heaven, and sent what he had promised, the Holy Spirit, and they were filled, like new wineskins with new wine. The Lord, after all, had said, *Nobody puts new wine into old wineskins* (Mk 2:22). To show you that this was fulfilled, the Jews were amazed, and some of them said, apparently in mockery, and not knowing what they said, *These people are full of new wine* (Acts 2:13).

So with the Holy Spirit endowing them with the gift, and dictating<sup>3</sup> to them and teaching them, they spoke in languages which they hadn't learned. In their own nation they had learned one, perhaps two; but now they spoke, what are we to say, three languages, four, five, six? Why ask about the number? *There are no dialects nor modes of speech whose voices are not heard*; you heard the psalm just now, when it was sung. And they were slain, but their words were written down. What did those who slew them achieve? *Their sound went forth into all the earth*. We, settled in Africa, were a long way away from that place, where there were no dialects nor modes of speech whose voices were not heard. We were far away from there, lying far away, sleeping far away. But to rouse us from our sleep, *their sound went forth into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the whole wide world* (Ps 19:3-4). *Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and he will enlighten you* (Eph 5:14), the one who said to Peter, *Do you love me?*

Who is of sufficient caliber to speak worthily of Peter? Who can speak enough about Peter? Meaning no disrespect, blessed Peter, let me stop talking about you for a little while, though it was your sound that woke me up. My sermon cannot only be devoted to you; you are not the only one who suffered today. You are indeed the first of the apostles, but the last of them earned the right to be your companion.

*Paul appropriately named Saul earlier on, after the king of Israel who persecuted David*

4. Let the blessed Paul too step out in front of us, let us say a little something about Paul.<sup>4</sup> That, you see, is why he wanted to be named Paul, because previously he was called Saul. Saul first, Paul later on; because proud first, humble later on. Recall the first name, and in it recognize the persecutor's crime. Saul was named after king Saul. That Saul, after whom our Saul was called, persecuted Saint David, and Saint David represented Christ, who was going to come from the seed of David through the virgin Mary. Saul played the part of king Saul, when he persecuted Christians. He was the fiercest of persecutors; when the blessed Stephen was stoned, he it was who kept the clothes of those

who were doing the stoning, so that he might do it himself through the hands of them all.

After the martyrdom of the blessed Stephen, the brothers and sisters who were in Jerusalem were dispersed; and because they were lights, they were alight with the Spirit of God; wherever they came, they kindled the light. Then as Saul saw the gospel of Christ spreading, he was filled with the bitterest jealousy and zeal. He received letters from the chief priests,<sup>5</sup> and set off to bring back in chains to be punished any people at all he could find confessing the name of Christ; and he was going along breathing out slaughter, thirsting for blood. It was like that, while he was going along like that, while thirsting for blood like that, while searching out anyone at all he could bring back and slay, a persecutor like that to the hilt, that he heard the voice from heaven.<sup>6</sup> My brothers and sisters, what good had he deserved? What evil had he not deserved? And yet by a single voice from heaven he was struck down as a persecutor, raised up as a preacher.

*The meaning of the name Paul, paulus meaning little or tiny; it signifies humility, and total dependence on grace*

5. Here's where you have Paul after Saul; here he is, already preaching, here he is, already showing us what he had been and what he was. *I*, he says, *am the least of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:9). If least, very properly Paul. Recall the Latin word; *paulum* means "little." That's certainly how we talk: "I will see you in a little while, *post paulum*." So this Paul admitted he was the least, like the hem of the Lord's garment, which the sick woman touched.<sup>7</sup> The point is, suffering as she did from an issue of blood, she stood for the Church of the nations; the nations to which Paul was sent, both the least and the last, since the hem is the least and the last part of a garment. Paul confessed to both things; he called himself both least and last. *I am the least of the apostles*; he said it himself. *I am the least of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:8); he said it himself. We aren't doing him any wrong, he said it himself.

And what else did he say? Let him say it himself, in case we should seem to be doing him wrong; although it cannot be doing Paul wrong in any way at all, where the grace of Christ is being commended to us.<sup>8</sup> All the same, brothers and sisters, let us hear the man himself. *I am*, he says, *the least of the apostles, not being worthy to be called an apostle*. There's what he was: *not being worthy to be called an apostle*.

Why not?

*Because I persecuted the Church of God.*

And how is it you are an apostle?

*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace in me has not been idle, but I worked harder than them all.*

Pardon me, Saint Paul, but people who don't understand will think it's still Saul speaking. *I worked harder than all of them*, has the appearance of being said out of pride. Still, it was said with truth; but what comes next? Yes, when he sees he has said something which could set him on a kind of pedestal, *I worked*

harder, he says, *than all of them*; and straightaway, *not I, though, but the grace of God with me* (1 Cor 15:9-10). Humility recognized itself, infirmity trembled, perfect charity acknowledged the gift of God.

So speak now as being full of grace, as *the chosen vessel* (Acts 9:15), as having become what you were not worthy to be, speak, write to Timothy, and announce this day. *For I*, he says, *am already being immolated*. It was read just now from Paul's letter, what I've just said was read here: *For I*, he says, *am already being immolated*; immolation is hanging over me. The slaughter of the saints, you see, is a sacrifice to God. *For I am already being immolated, and time presses for me to cast off. I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith. For the rest, there remains for me a crown of justice, which the Lord will award me on that day, the just judge* (2 Tm 4:6-8). The one who bestows the merits will reward the merits. He became an apostle, though he was not worthy, and will he be unworthy to be crowned? There, you see, when he received a grace, quite gratuitous, in no way his due, *I am not worthy*, he said, *to be called an apostle, but by the grace of God I am what I am*. Now, on the contrary, he is demanding his due: *I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith; but for the rest there remains for me a crown of justice*, a crown of justice is my due. And to show you it's something due, *which the Lord will award me*. I didn't say, "gives me," or "bestows on me," but *will award me on that day, the just judge*. The Merciful one bestowed something on me, the Just one will make me an award.

I can see, blessed Paul, what the crown is due to; your merits. But looking back to what you were, I recognize that these very merits of yours are God's gifts. You said, *I have fought the good fight*; but it was you yourself who said, *Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Cor 15:57). So you fought a good fight, but it was by the gift of Christ that you were victorious. You said, *I have completed the course*; but it was you yourself who said, *no thanks to the one who wills, or the one who runs, but to God who shows mercy* (Rom 9:16). You said, *I have kept the faith*; but it was you yourself who said, *I have obtained mercy, that I should be faithful* (1 Cor 7:25). So we can see that your merits are God's gifts, and that's why we rejoice over your crown.

And if I have been unequal to the praises of the blessed apostles, whose feast day we are celebrating, at least I haven't failed the expectations of your graces, insofar as the one who crowned them has been pleased to assist me.

## NOTES

1. No date is suggested by any editor. But for reasons given in notes 2 and 8 below, I am inclined to date this sermon to about the year 415, and see no reason to suppose it was preached anywhere else than Hippo Regius.

2. There is an allusion here to the habit of the Donatist bishops (according to Augustine) of claiming their flocks as their own. But as he doesn't in the least labor the point, one may tentatively infer that the Donatist problem, while still of course with the African Church, was fading into the background.

3. Augustine quite happily shared the naive view of divine revelation as a process of divine dictation. Taken literally it is indeed naive; but as an image, a pictorial representation of the mystery of revelation, it is fair enough.

4. Playing on the name Paul, *paululum aliquid de Paulo dicamus*, as he goes on to explain. We cannot do it in English, unless we translate Paul into Tiny, just as we cannot reproduce the play on Peter's name, unless we translate him into Rocky.

5. All manuscripts but two omit the word "priests"—he received letters from the chiefs. The two must be correct.

6. See Acts 9:1-4.

7. See Mk 5:27-29.

8. This concern to teach the lesson of grace suggests the Pelagian period in Augustine's career, rather than what we could call the high Donatist period. Hence my suggestion for the date as about 415.

9. Reading *Non dixi* instead of the text's *Non dixit*, he didn't say.

## SERMON 299C

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

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

*Peter the first of the apostles, Paul the last*

1. The blessed apostles Peter and Paul were called at different times, and crowned on the same day. The Lord called Peter before all the others, Paul after all the others; Peter the first of the apostles, Paul the last; they were led to martyrdom on one and the same day by the First and the Last. A most beautiful perfection is maintained when ends agree with beginnings. The apostle Peter staggered in the sea; Peter was the only one to stagger, but then he was the only one to walk on the sea.<sup>2</sup> He was the only one to deny the Lord out of fear, but then he was the only one to follow the Lord into danger out of love.<sup>3</sup> The blessed John was there too, but he was relying on the friendship of the high priest; John, you see, was a friend of the high priest, to whose house the Lord was taken.<sup>4</sup> Peter followed out of love; infirmity trembled, but charity wept, and infirmity received a pardon.

Paul though, Saul to begin with, was even an enemy of Christ; he persecuted Christians with the utmost severity. When the first martyr, Saint Stephen, suffered, he was right there; while he was being stoned, he was keeping the clothes of those who were doing the stoning. You see, it struck him as being altogether too little, if he just threw stones with his own hands; he was doing it with the hands of all those whose garments he was keeping. After that, with the most blessed Stephen slain, and the first to be crowned—because his name in Greek means crown—this fiercest of enemies received letters from the chief priests, so that anyone at all he should find following this way, he should bring along in chains for punishment. So off he went raging to Damascus, breathing out slaughter, thirsting for blood.<sup>5</sup> But *the one who was dwelling in the heavens*, as the psalm has it, *was laughing at him, and the Lord was making fun of him* (Ps 2:4). Why are you so savagely breathing out what you are soon to be suffering yourself? What a very small thing indeed it was for the Lord Christ to save his enemy, with one word from above to lay low the persecutor, raise up the preacher! *Saul*, he said, *Saul*, yes, still *Saul*, *why are you persecuting me?* (Acts 9:4).



*The whole Christ is the head and members together*

2. What a tremendous honor, my brothers and sisters! In the Lord's words we are to recognize ourselves. Who could still be persecuting Christ, when he was seated in heaven at the right hand of the Father? But while the head was reigning there, the members were still toiling away here. *The teacher of the nations* (2 Tm 1:11) himself, the blessed apostle Paul, has taught us what we are in relation to Christ: *But you, he says, are the body of Christ and his members* (1 Cor 12:27). So the whole Christ is head and members. Look at our own bodies, grasp the comparison. If you happen to be hurt in a crowd, and someone treads on your foot, the head yells for the foot. And what does it yell? "You're treading on me." *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* (Acts 9:4).

When Saul, you see, was persecuting the preachers of the gospel, through whom the Lord was being carried throughout the world, Christ's feet were being trampled on by him; it was on them, after all, that Christ was going out to the nations, on them that Christ was running all over the place. The future foot was trampling on Christ's feet. The man who was going to carry the Lord's gospel throughout the whole wide world, was trampling on what he himself was going to be. *How beautiful are the feet, as the prophet says, and this very teacher reminds us, of those who bring news of peace, who bring good news!* (Is 52:7; Rom 10:15). There was also this that we sang in the psalm: *Their sound has gone forth into all the earth. Do you want to see where Christ has got to on those feet? And their words to the ends of the whole wide world* (Ps 19:4).

*Paul the wolf turned into both sheep and shepherd*

3. Finally, when the Lord was speaking to Ananias, when he sent him to baptize Paul, he heard from this same Ananias, *Lord, I have heard of this man, that he is everywhere persecuting your servants* (Acts 9:13). As though to say, "Why are you sending a sheep to a wolf?" Ananias, you see, is a Hebrew word, which in English means "sheep."<sup>6</sup> About Saul, on the other hand, the future Paul, about the persecutor who was the future preacher, the prophet had given advance notice: *Benjamin, a ravenous wolf* (Gn 49:27). What's Benjamin got to do with it? Listen to Paul himself: *For I too am an Israelite, of the race of Abraham, the tribe of Benjamin* (Rom 11:1). *A ravenous wolf; in the morning he will ravage, in the evening he will divide the food* (Gn 49:27); first he will gobble up, afterward he will feed.

You see, he was dividing the food now that he was a preacher; he knew what to give to whom; what nourishment to administer to the sick and the weak, on what food to feed the strong. I mean, it was as dividing the food, dividing it, not throwing it around at random, as dividing the food, you see, that he said, *And I, brothers, was unable to speak to you as spiritual people, but as of the flesh; as babies in Christ I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet capable of it; well in fact you are not even capable of it yet* (1 Cor 3:1-2). I divide it, I don't throw it around at random. So when the sheep Ananias heard the name of this wolf, he started trembling even in the hands of the shepherd. But while

he's terrified of the wolf, he's reassured by the shepherd, encouraged, kept safe. He hears incredible things about this wolf, but with Truth saying them they are true and reliable. What answer, I mean, did the Lord give Ananias as he trembled at the notoriety of Paul, what answer did he give? *Let it be so now;*<sup>7</sup> this man is a chosen vessel for me, to carry my name before nations and kings. I myself will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake (Acts 9:15-16). *I'll show him*; it sounds like a threat, but it's the preparation for a crown. Anyway, once turned preacher from persecutor, what did he have to endure? *Dangers at sea, dangers from rivers, dangers in the town, dangers in the countryside, dangers among false brethren; in toil and hardship, in many vigils, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, often at the point of death; besides these outward things, the daily assault on me of my anxiety for all the Churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is tripped up, and I am not hot with indignation?* (2 Cor 11:26-29).

There's this persecutor for you. Suffer, endure; you'll suffer more than you inflicted on others; but don't resent it, you have received a good rate of interest. But what was he expecting, when he was enduring such things? Listen to him in another place: *Indeed*, he says, *this light affliction of ours*. So now all that is just light? Why? *Is working to an incredible degree an eternal weight of glory for us, as we keep our gaze fixed, not on the things that can be seen but on those that cannot be seen? For the things that can be seen are temporary, while the things that cannot be seen are eternal* (2 Cor 4:17-18). So he was aflame with love for eternal things, while he was bravely enduring evils which, even if harsh and extreme, were still only temporary. All punishment that comes to an end is light, when it is promised a reward that has no end.

*It was Christ in Paul who was enduring all these things*

4. And yet all the same, when was he enduring all this? Wasn't it rather the one who couldn't fall away that was enduring it all in him and with him? I've not the slightest hesitation in saying that it wasn't Paul who was enduring it. Yes, he was the one enduring it, because he was faithfully willing to do so; and he wasn't the one enduring it, because the strength of Christ was dwelling in him. Christ was controlling him, Christ was providing him with power, Christ was not abandoning him, Christ was running in the runner, Christ was guiding him through to the winning post. So I'm not doing him any wrong, when I say that he wasn't the one who was enduring. I say it definitely, I say it with absolute confidence, and I can confirm my words with him as my witness. I won't allow the holy apostle to flare up at me, when I quote his own words to him. Tell us, Paul, tell us, holy man, tell us, apostle; let my brothers and sisters hear that I have done you no wrong at all.

So what does he say, when he compares himself and his labors with his fellow apostles? He wasn't afraid to say, *I have worked harder than all of them*. Here I now get the answer straightaway, "Certainly not himself."

"So say what comes next, in case this delay should give me a swollen head;

*I have worked harder than them all.*"<sup>8</sup> You had already all begun to get angry with me; but he intercedes for me, and somehow addresses you all:

"Don't be angry: *not I, however, but the grace of God with me*" (1 Cor 15:10).

So in the same vein, what did he also say, when speaking about his martyrdom that was hanging over him, which we are celebrating on this great feast day? *For I am already being immolated, and time presses for me to cast off. I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith. For the rest there remains for me a crown of justice, which the Lord will award me on that day, the just judge* (2 Tm 4:6-8). *Will award*; there is, after all, someone to award it to. *I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith.* What is awarded is his due; but there wouldn't be anyone it was due to, unless an advance payment had been made to him which was not his due.

Certainly you hear him in this passage assuming that God is in his debt, you hear now about Christ paying it; listen through Paul himself to Christ making an advance payment that was not owed him. *I am not*, he says, *fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.* Now consider what was owed the man for whom you see a crown already being prepared; consider him earlier on, and see if you don't find him deserving of punishment for what he did. Persecuting the Church of God; what cross does he not deserve for that? What torments would be adequate to punish him with? *I am not worthy*, he says, *to be called an apostle.* I know what was my due; an apostleship for me, who persecuted the Church of God?

So how, then, an apostle?

*But by the grace of God I am what I am.*

O grace given gratis, free, for nothing! It found something to punish, but made something to award a crown to. Notice what comes next. *By the grace*, he says, *of God I am what I am.* On my own, I mean, I am not fit to be an apostle, because *I persecuted the Church of God*; I was expecting punishment, I find a reward. How did this happen to me? Because *by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace has not been idle in me, but I have worked harder than all of them.*

Have you started yet again to set yourself up?

*Not I, though, but the grace of God with me* (1 Cor 15:9-10).

Good, excellent, no longer Saul, but Paul, no longer proud, but small. Saul was a name of pride, for the reason that that tall king,<sup>9</sup> and he was all the more jealous for being head and shoulders over the rest, was called Saul, the one who persecuted Saint David. So this Saul got his name from that Saul, a suitable name for a persecutor. What name later on? Paul. What's Paul? Little, least. Think about the word, those of you who know your letters; think about your habit of speech, those of you who are unacquainted with what is called liberal literature; *paulus* is little; I will see you *post paululum*, in a little while; *paulo post*, a little later I will see you.<sup>10</sup>

*Paul the hem of the Lord's garment*

5. So look at Paul, just lately Saul, thirsting for blood, breathing out slaughter, but now Paul; *I am the least of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:9); certainly the least, but also the most effective. Perhaps this least of them was the hem in the Lord's garment; the one that woman touched, and was thereby healed of the issue of blood, the woman in whom the Church of the nations was represented. Paul, you see, Tiny, was sent to the nations with the health of salvation. Furthermore you should know this, that this woman who touched the Lord's hem, was unknown to the Lord, but the Lord's ignorance is symbolic. What, I ask you, was he really ignorant of? And yet, because that woman represented the Church of the nations, where the Lord was never personally present, but where he was present through his disciples, he said when his hem was touched, *Who touched me? And the apostles said, The crowds are crushing you, and you can say, Who touched me? And he said, Someone touched me* (Lk 8:43-46). The crowds crush, faith touches. Brothers and sisters, be among those who touch, not among those who crush. *Who touched me?* and *Someone touched me*; Christ appears not to know; he's signifying something; not lying, but signifying—signifying what? *A people whom I did not know has entered my service* (Ps 18:43).

Say then, Apostle, with your martyrdom imminent, spending yourself in hard work, demanding your crown, say, *For I am already being immolated, and time presses for me to cast off. I have fought the good fight* (2 Tm 4:7).

What use would fighting be, unless victory followed? You say that you fought, tell us how you won.

Question another place. *Thanks be to God, who has given us the victory though our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Cor 15:57). *I have completed the course* (2 Tm 4:7).

You have completed the course? Remember that thing you said, *No thanks to the one who wills or the one who runs, but to God who shows mercy* (Rom 9:16). Say something more.

*I have kept the faith* (2 Tm 4:7).

You've kept it, you've guarded it jealously. But, *unless the Lord guards the city, those who guard it keep watch in vain* (Ps 127:1). So for you to keep the faith, that one helped you, that one kept it in you, who said to your fellow apostle, with whom you are sharing this one single day of martyrdom, said what you've read in the gospel, *I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may not fail* (Lk 22:32).

So make your demand; the reward is ready. Say, *I have fought the good fight*; it's true. *I have completed the course*; it's true. I have kept the faith; it's true. *For the rest there remains for me a crown of justice, which the Lord will award me on that day, the just judge* (2 Tm 4:7-8). Demand your due; it's ready for you, definitely your crown is ready for you. But remember that your merits are God's gifts.

## NOTES

1. No date is suggested by anyone. My inclination would be to place it at about the same time as Sermon 175, in which he gives the same wholly fanciful interpretation of the name Ananias as "sheep." See note 6, below. That sermon is dated 412. The style also exhibits the free, sometimes careless quality that marks his middle years. Hippo Regius seems the most likely place for the sermon.

2. See Mt 14:28-31.

3. See Mk 14:54.

4. See Jn 18:15-17.

5. See Acts 7:58—8:3; 9:1-2.

6. See Sermons 175, 8, note 15; 279, 2, note 8.

7. He's getting an odd wire crossed here; this is what Jesus said to John the Baptist when he hesitated about baptizing him, Mt 3:15. What he said to Ananias was, *Get going*.

8. This is a conversational passage in which it is peculiarly difficult to tell who is being presented as the speaker, Augustine or Paul. I take this little speech to be the apostle's. But it is as though he keeps on interrupting a dialogue between Augustine and the congregation.

9. See 1 Sm 10:23.

10. He adds, *paulo post, modico post*. But I have already rendered *paulo post* by "a little later." So there is no point in my doing so again immediately afterward.

## SERMON 299D

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE HOLY SCILLITAN MARTYRS

*Date: 413<sup>1</sup>*

*We are to despise not only the superfluities but also the necessities of life for Christ's sake: well-being and friends*

1. The holy martyrs, witnesses of God, preferred to live by dying, in order not to die by living; in order not to deny life by fearing death, they despised life by loving life. To get them to deny Christ, the enemy was promising them life, but not the kind Christ was. So as they believed the promises of the Savior, they laughed at the threats of the persecutor. Brothers and sisters, when we celebrate the festivals of the martyrs, we should know that examples are being set before us, which we should try to match by imitating them. After all, by getting together like this we don't increase the glory of the martyrs. The crowns they won are known to the congregations of angels. For our part, we could hear what they suffered when the account was read; but as for what they received, *neither has eye seen nor ear heard* (1 Cor 2:9).

Of the goods of this world some are superfluous, others necessary. Give your attention, please, as I speak about this for a few moments, so that we may distinguish, if we can, what the superfluous goods of this world are, and what the necessary ones; and so that you may see that Christ is not to be denied for the sake either of superfluous or of necessary things. Who could count the superfluous things of this world? If we wanted to make a list of them, it would take a very long time. So let's say what the necessities are; anything else will be superfluous. Necessities in this world amount to these two things: well-being<sup>2</sup> and a friend. These are the things which we should value highly and not despise. Well-being and a friend are goods of nature. God made man to be and to live; that's well-being; but so that he shouldn't be alone,<sup>3</sup> a system of friendship was worked out. So friendship begins with married partner and children, and from there moves on to strangers. But if we consider that we all have one father and one mother,<sup>4</sup> who will be a stranger? Every human being is neighbor to every other human being. Ask nature; is he unknown? He's human. Is she an enemy? She's human. Is he a foe? He's human. Is she a friend? Let her stay a friend. Is he an enemy? Let him become a friend.

*Wisdom comes, like a visitor, to join these two necessities, well-being and friends*

2. So to these two things that are so necessary in this world, well-being and a friend, along came Wisdom as a visitor. She found everyone sunk in folly, going astray, cultivating the superfluous, in love with temporal things, ignorant of eternal things. This Wisdom was no friend to fools. So since she was no friend to fools and a long way away from fools, she took to herself a neighbor of ours, and became herself our neighbor. That's the mystery of Christ. What are so far from each other as folly and wisdom? What are so near, such neighbors to each other, as man and man? What such a long way away, I repeat, from folly as wisdom? So Wisdom took a man to herself, and thus became a neighbor to man through what was already a neighbor to him.

And lo and behold, since Wisdom herself said to man, *Behold, godliness is wisdom* (Jb 28:28); while it is the business of man's wisdom to worship God, because that's what godliness is; there were therefore given us two commandments: *You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind*; the other, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. And the man who was told this<sup>5</sup> said, *And who is my neighbor?* (Lk 10:27.29). He thought the Lord was going to say, "Your father and your mother, your wife, your children, your brothers, your sisters." That's not what he answered, but as he wished to impress on us that every human being is neighbor to every other human being, he undertook to tell a story.

*Some man*, he said, *or other*. Who? Someone or other, a human being all the same. *Some man or other*. So which man? Someone or other, but all the same a human being. *Went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers*. Those too are called robbers, who keep on harrying us.<sup>6</sup> Wounded, stripped, left half dead in the road, he was ignored by passers-by, by a priest, by a levite; but he was taken notice of by a passing Samaritan. He was approached, and after careful examination he was lifted onto the beast, brought to an inn; the order was given for him to be cared for, expenses were paid.<sup>7</sup> The one who had asked the question is questioned himself; who was a neighbor to this man left half dead? Because two had ignored him, and it was neighbors that had ignored him, while a foreigner approached him. This man from Jerusalem, you see, regarded priests and levites as neighbors, Samaritans as foreigners. The neighbors passed by, and the foreigner became a neighbor. So who was a neighbor to this man? You there, tell us, you that asked the question, *Who is my neighbor?* Now answer what the truth is. It was pride that had asked; let nature now speak. So what did he say? *I suppose, the one who showed him kindness. And the Lord said to him, Go, and do likewise yourself* (Lk 10:36-37).

*What is well-being for you must be well-being for your neighbor*

3. Let's get back to the matter in hand. There are now three things we observe, well-being, a friend, wisdom. But well-being and a friend also come from this world; wisdom is from somewhere else. Well-being requires food and clothing,

and if bad health comes along, medicine. The apostle who was well, speaking to people who were well, said, *But a great advantage is godliness with sufficiency. We brought nothing, he said, into this world, but neither can we take anything away. Having food and clothing, with these let us be content.* These are necessary for well-being; what's needed, though, for the superfluities? *For those who wish, he says, to get rich—for the sake of superfluities, naturally—fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge a person into destruction and ruin* (1 Tm 6:6-9). So where's the well-being? So for the sake of well-being, *having food and clothing, with these let us be content.*

What for the sake of a friend? What more could you be told than *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Lk 10:27; Mk 12:31)? So what is well-being for you must also be well-being for your friend. As regards the friend's clothing, *Whoever has two shirts, should share with the one who has none*; as regards the friend's food, *and whoever has food should do likewise* (Lk 3:11). You're fed, you feed; you're clothed, you clothe. All that from this world; from elsewhere though, which is where wisdom comes in, you learn, and you teach.

*How the martyrs despised superfluities*

4. Now set before your eyes the contest engaged in by the martyrs. Here comes the opponent, he's forcing them to deny Christ. But let's bring him on still coaxing, not yet raging. He promises riches and honors. They are superfluities; people tempted by such gifts to deny Christ haven't yet entered the contest, haven't yet experienced the struggle, haven't yet challenged the oldest enemy of them all to a real battle. The faithful man, though, who was promised such things, despised them,<sup>8</sup> and said, "Shall I, just for the sake of riches, deny Christ? I, for the sake of riches, deny riches? I, for the sake of gold, deny the treasure? I mean to say, he is the one *who became poor for our sakes, though he was rich, so that we might be enriched by his poverty* (2 Cor 8:9). I mean to say, he's the one about whom again the apostle says, *in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden away* (Col 2:30). Your mind is on what you are promising, because you can't see what you're trying to deprive me of. I, by faith, see what you want to take away from me; you, with the eyes of flesh, see what you want to give me. The things that the eye of the heart gazes on are better than what the eye of flesh can see. *For the things that can be seen are temporary, while the things that cannot be seen are eternal* (2 Cor 4:18). So I despise your gifts," said the faithful soul, "because they're temporary, they're superfluous, they rot, they fly away, they're full of dangers, full of temptations. We none of us have them when we want, or lose them when we want."

The maker of promises has been disdained, another figure comes on the scene, that is the persecutor; disdained in his coaxing, he starts raging; disdained as a snake, he has turned into a lion. "You don't want," he says, "to receive more ample riches from me? If you don't deny Christ, I will take away what you have."



“It’s still against my superfluities that you’re raging. *Like a sharp razor, you have practiced deceit (Ps 52:2)*. You shave off the hairs, you don’t cut the skin; take all that away from me too. Or rather, since you saw what I used to give from it to the poor, how I used to take in strangers, how I used to do what Paul advised: *Command, he said, the rich of this world, command them not to think proudly of themselves, nor to place their hopes in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God, who provides us abundantly with everything for our enjoyment. Let them do good, let them be rich in good works, let them give easily, let them share, let them store up for themselves a good fund for the future, so that they may lay hold of true life (1 Tm 6:17-19).*<sup>9</sup> When you take all this away from me, I’m not going to perform these good works; shall I be any the less in God’s eyes, because I wish to, and am not able to? Or am I so deaf to the voice of the angels, *Peace on earth to men of good will (Lk 2:14)*? So deprive me of my superfluities; *we brought nothing into this world, but neither can we take anything away. Having food and clothing, with that let us be content (1 Tm 6:7-8).*”

*How they even despised the necessities of life*

5. But the persecutor says, “I can deprive you of food, I can deprive you of clothing.” They have come now to the struggle, the opponent has started raging more hotly; superfluities are over and done with, they’ve got down to the necessities.

*Do not withdraw from me, since affliction is very close (Ps 22:11).*

There is nothing so close to your soul as your own<sup>10</sup> flesh. Hunger and thirst and heat, these you feel in your flesh.<sup>11</sup> That’s where I want to see you, good martyr, witness of God.

See me, he says, see me. *Who shall separate us from the charity of Christ?* What is it you’re threatening to do?

I can deprive you of food, I can deprive you of clothing.

*Shall affliction, or distress, or hunger, or nakedness? (Rom 8:35).*

Let the threat now come from the other side: I can deprive you of your friend, I can kill your nearest and dearest, I will butcher your wife and children before your eyes.

You can kill, you can kill? Let them only not deny Christ, and you can’t kill them. What’s this? Because you don’t terrify me about me, can you terrify me about mine? If they don’t deny Christ, you can’t kill mine; if they do, you’re killing strangers.

Let the persecutor go one step further still, let him rage, and say, “If you don’t care about your own people, I will remove you yourself from this light of day.”

From this light; surely not from the eternal light? From which light will you remove me? The light I have in common even with you. It can’t be of great importance, the light even you can see. I, for the sake of this light, will not deny the light; *that was the true light (Jn 1:9)*. I know to whom I can say, *Since with*

*you is the fountain of life, and in your light we shall see light* (Ps 36:9). Take my life, take away the light; I will still have life, still have the light. I will have life where I will not have to endure you as a killer; I will have the light which, I won't say you, but not even any night will be able to deprive me of.

The martyr wins. Or is there any greater contest, anything anywhere else, we ought to be the spectators of? No. He threatens death, he savages bodily well-being, he plows with hooks, tortures with racks, burns with flames, brings on wild animals. Here too he is conquered. Why is he conquered? Because *in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us* (Rom 8:37).

*Nothing and nobody more necessary to us than Christ*

6. So, my brothers and sisters, let Christ never be denied for the sake of superfluities, never be denied for the sake of necessities; nobody is more necessary, more closely related to us, than he is.<sup>12</sup> I was talking about necessities, well-being and a friend. You sin for the sake of well-being, and you deny Christ; by loving your well-being you ensure you won't have well-being. You sin for the sake of your friend, and in order not to offend him, you deny Christ. Woe is me! Sometimes he's denied with a blush.

There's no persecutor raging, no plunderer despoiling, no torturer working on you; simply in order not to displease your friend, you deny your Lord. I can see what your friend has deprived you of; show me what he'll give you. What will he give? The very friendship by which you sin, by which you are made into an enemy of God. This man wouldn't be a friend to you, if you were one to yourself; but since you are your own enemy, you think your enemy is a friend. What makes you your own enemy, though? The fact that you love iniquity; *But whoever loves iniquity hates his own soul* (Ps 11:5). But Christ is not being denied to please a perverse and godless friend; he's not being denied, but he's being viciously attacked by the godless friend, accused by the godless friend, and not being defended by the shamefaced believer; he's being abandoned, kept quiet about, not being proclaimed. The blasphemer's tongue is tearing him to shreds, and there's no tongue singing his praises.

How many evil deeds are committed as if for the sake of necessities, for food, for clothing, for health, for a friend; and all these things which are being desired are in fact being lost. But if you make light of these things in the present, God will give you them for eternity. Make light of health, you will have immortality; make light of death, you will have life; make light of honor, you will have a crown; make light of the friendship of man, you will have the friendship of God. But there, where you have God as your friend, you won't be without the friendship of a neighbor; there as your friends these martyrs will be with you, whose confessions and deeds were being read to us a short while ago.

*The courage of these martyrs, men and women;  
what we will lose if we deny Christ*

7. We heard about men acting bravely, confessing manfully; we heard about women being true to Christ, not like women, but forgetful of their sex.<sup>13</sup> In that place we shall enjoy their friendship without any lusts of the flesh, and there will only be Wisdom to be enjoyed with friends. See what we lose, if we love these things here, and deny Christ! We won't be terrified there of a neighbor dying; there will be no grief there, where there's eternal life, nor will this be necessary anymore: *Having food and clothing, with these let us be content* (1 Tm 6:8). Immortality will be our clothes, charity will be the food there, so will eternal life. Nor shall we be doing the good works there which are concerned with these things; but if we don't do them here, we won't get to them there.

You won't be told, *Break your bread for the hungry* (Is 58:7), where there is no famine. You won't be told, "Show hospitality," where you don't find any stranger or traveler. You won't be told, "Deliver the oppressed," where there is no enemy. You won't be told, "Pacify the quarrelsome," where there is eternal peace. Notice, my brothers and sisters, how much we put up with here in seeking peace; there, where we cannot perish, we shall just possess it. Do you seek well-being? Make light of it, and you shall have it. You deny Christ, being afraid of spoiling your friendship with men; confess Christ, and you will enjoy the friendship of the city of the angels, the city of the patriarchs, the city of the prophets, the city of the apostles, the city of all the martyrs, the city of all the good faithful. Christ himself *established it for ever* (Ps 48:8).

## NOTES

1. O. Perler says, not later than 413, but he inclines to its being preached in that year, when Augustine spent the whole summer in Carthage. It was preached there in the New Market Basilica, *Basilica Novarum*, for which see Sermon 14, note 1. For the Scillitan martyrs, see Sermon 37, note 1, first paragraph. They were a group of twelve, seven men and five women. They came from a small town, about whose name there seems to be no agreement: Scilla, Scillite, Scillium, and were tried and put to death in Carthage in the year 180, the protomartyrs, it seems, of Africa. They were celebrated on 17 July. See Butler's *Lives of the Saints* under that date, both under Scillitan Martyrs, and under Speratus and companions. Their Acts were published by J. Armitage Robinson in *Texts and Studies*, London, 1891.

2. *Salus*; primarily health, ultimately salvation. I choose well-being as comprehensively in the middle.

3. See Gn 2:18.

4. Primarily Adam and Eve, of course; but also, not far from the front of Augustine's mind, God and the Church.

5. Actually in Luke's version, which Augustine is clearly quoting here, it was the man himself, not Jesus who recited these two commandments from the law of the Old Testament.

6. He is almost certainly thinking of demons.

7. See Lk 10:30-35.

8. Here the statement is so particular, that there is probably an allusion to the Acts of these martyrs, and to what their spokesman replied to the Roman magistrate's first offer; no doubt much elaborated by the preacher.

9. After this long quotation, he forgets he left a sentence hanging in the air, and that he was intending to conclude, in all probability, "take it away from the poor."

10. Reading *tuae* and *tua* for the text's *suae* and *sua*.

11. As hunger and thirst relate to food, so heat, I imagine, relates to clothing, which in a North African summer is more a protection from heat than from cold. But it is also mentioned, I rather think, because the most common torture inflicted on the victims was torture in one way or another by fire.

It is a grammatically odd little sentence; "hunger," "thirst" and "heat" being in the nominative case, and yet objects of the verb "you feel."

I am taking this little speech as what the persecutor says, not Augustine speaking in his own person.

12. *Necessarius* has this double meaning in Latin of both "necessary" and "related"; our relatives are our "necessaries," hard though it may sometimes be for us to accept the fact.

13. Sorry, ladies! The hoary old chauvinist assumption that women are not naturally brave, like men.

## SERMON 299E

### DISCOURSE ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE SCILLITAN SAINTS IN THE NEW MARKET BASILICA

Date: 397<sup>1</sup>

*Christians, men and women alike, should say when enduring tribulation,  
"The Lord is my strength," and "I will love you, Lord, my might"*

1. The strength, the fortitude, of Christ's martyrs, men and women alike, is Christ. If men alone, you see, stood out as being brave and strong in suffering, their courage would be attributed to their being the stronger sex. The reason the weaker sex too has been able to suffer bravely, is that God was able make it possible in people of all sorts. Accordingly, be they men, be they women, in their tribulations they all ought to say, *The Lord is my strength* (Ps 118:14), and *I will love you, Lord, my might* (Ps 18:1). Love is itself might, or courage; I mean, if you really know how to love, you can endure anything and everything for what you love. And if the lewd kind of love has persuaded lovers to suffer many things bravely for the sake of their frivolities and delinquencies, and if those who set traps for someone else's chastity don't take any danger into consideration; how much braver in the charity of God ought those to be who love him, since neither alive nor dead can they be separated from him! The unchaste lover obviously loses what he loves, if he is killed for the sake of his beloved; but the brave and just lover of God not only doesn't lose what he has loved because he dies, but in fact by dying he finds what he has loved. Finally, the lover of delinquency is afraid to confess it, the lover of God is afraid to deny him.

So let us choose a love, brothers and sisters, in which we can live innocent lives, and die a carefree death. If we choose this sort of love, you see, when our breasts are wholly taken over by it, then for us *to live will be Christ, and to die will be gain* (Phil 1:21). By dying we escape from what we hate; by dying we arrive at what we love. In any case, let those who love this life make it long-lasting, if they can, by loving it. They can't.<sup>2</sup> Love it, love it not, what you love is running out on you; it's running out, you can't hold it.

Years are added, your life span diminishes, what remains grows shorter; so as your life stretches out, years aren't really added, but if you think of the ones

that are left, they have been subtracted. If they had been added, surely, they would have made your life longer; but now, as it is, you have left to you, for example, thirty years; simply by going on living, you are reducing them. It's been pointless, your adding many years to the day of your birth; simply by living long, you've made them fewer. Look at the fingers of someone counting them, not to tell you how many have already passed for you, but how many have remained; and you can see that they come to the point where there aren't any left.<sup>3</sup>

After all, if you're keeping an appointment at nine o'clock, you can't call back six o'clock; nor do you make tomorrow out of yesterday come and gone; after a little while even tomorrow will be yesterday. What's the good of not making light of these things, which you can't hold onto by loving them? The day, if you love it, runs out on you; God, if you desire him, approaches you. Love the thing you reach by loving it. He is trustworthy, he stands still, waiting for you; come to him. Even here you were sluggish about it; he came to you, he was born for your sake, he died for your sake.

*The doctor himself drinks the bitter cup of death, to teach us to say,  
"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints"*

2. So don't be afraid of the bitter cup of death; yes, death is bitter, but through this bitterness one passes to a glorious sweetness. This bitterness cures the bowels of your soul—not if you just die, but if you die for the truth. This bitterness is medicinal, not lethal; it heals your insides, drink it without a qualm. The doctor didn't hesitate to drink it, why does the sick patient hesitate to drink it? He didn't have anything that needed curing in him by the bitterness of that cup; he drank it for you, so that you might learn to say, *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints* (Ps 116:15). Those who have confessed Christ have suffered various deaths; some struck with the sword, some burned to ashes with fire, others thrown to wild animals, others even denied burial. All hard, all savage, all horrible kinds of death—but in the sight of men. That's why scripture, to commend the deaths of the martyrs, says *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints*; in the sight of the one who knows how to judge and is unable to be mistaken. Fools and unbelievers, you see, observing how present felicity was thought nothing of by the wise and by believers, regarded as unfortunate those who died for the name of Christ. They didn't have the eyes of faith, you see, therefore they were incapable of looking ahead to the things that had been promised.

The maker of the promises came, and the giver of the things promised; he made us stronger by his admonitions, he healed us completely by giving us the Spirit. He said, you see, *Do not fear those who kill the body, and have nothing more they can do*. Look at the fools raving, when they hear this, *they have nothing more they can do*. They do many things, after all, to the corpses; they mangle them, burn them, scatter them, don't allow them burial. And they say, in a boastful kind of way, "Where's this thing Christ said, that when man has

killed man, he has nothing more he can do? Look at all the things I've done to the dead person's corpse." His heart is as insensible as the flesh of the corpse which feels nothing. Stupid, dimwit, what have you actually done? If it can feel anything, you've done something; if it lacks sensation, you have been raging against it to no purpose.

*I will show you, he says, whom to fear; the one who has power, when he has slain, to cast into gehenna (Lk 12:4-5); something the man who strikes and kills does not have; he delivers a mortal wound to the flesh, but does not follow as the spirit departs, because he cannot even see it. Who is really to be feared? See who you are being slain by, see how you die. The same one has you in his power after death who had you in his power before death; because not even man could do anything against you unless that one permitted it. You're surprised at his permitting it? Listen to the prince of martyrs when he was being tried by a man, being himself God secretly, man openly, and as such treated with contempt.*

So while he was being tried by a man, the man gave himself airs: *Do you not answer me? Do you not know that I have the authority to put you to death, and to let you go?* And he, so gentle, the Lord of all, the servant of all, serving the sick not on terms but for love, also cured this man with the swollen head putting on airs. Christ was, to all appearances, being tried by him, he was being cured by Christ. Bighead used terror tactics, the doctor used the scalpel. Precisely on the point he liked to give himself airs about, that's where he got his answer. Not so as to be told, "You have no authority over me, but I rather have authority over you." If the Lord had said that, he would have been telling the truth, but he wouldn't have been setting us an example. He was teaching even during his passion, because he had been teaching even during his temptation. Just as he taught you when he was being tempted how to answer the tempter, so too he taught you when he was being tried how to answer the persecutor. Those words were ours, the head was speaking for the body. So what did he say? *You would have no authority over me, unless it had been given you from above (Jn 19:10-11).* He didn't say, "You don't have any," but, "You wouldn't have had any unless you had received it."

He was teaching martyrs to be submissive, not to men but to God; he was teaching martyrs, when they suffer anything from men, to fear, not men, but the one who permits men to act like that, who gives men authority. Taught by this magisterial lesson, that most valiant woman said, *Honor to Caesar, as Caesar; but reverence to God.*<sup>4</sup> She rendered to both their due,<sup>5</sup> making a fair distribution; her answer was prompted neither by pride nor by weakness. She paid attention to what the apostle said: *Be subject to every human institution for God's sake (1 Pt 2:13).* *Honor, she said, to Caesar as Caesar.* However cruel he may be, honor should be shown him; he should be treated with proper respect, even though he doesn't possess the pinnacle of authority. Supreme authority, after all, belongs to the one *in whose hands we are, both we ourselves and our words (Wis 7:16).* So *fear him,* says the Lord, *who has the power by which, even when he has killed, he isn't limited to that, isn't unable to do anything further, but even when he has killed has it in his power to cast into the gehenna of fire (Lk 12:5).*

*The lesson of the rich man and Lazarus*

3. You infidel there, you look to the present, you're cowed by present dangers; think sometimes about the future.<sup>6</sup> Tomorrow and tomorrow; sooner or later it will be the final and last tomorrow. Day treads on the heels of day, and never catches up with the one who made the day. With him, you see, there is a day without yesterday and tomorrow; with him, you see, there is day without sunrise or sunset; with him there is everlasting light, *there is the fountain of life, and in his light shall we see light* (Ps 36:9). At least let the heart be there; as long as the flesh has to be here, let the heart be there. The whole of you will be there if the heart is there.

The rich man in purple and fine linen came to the end of his delights; the poor man covered with sores came to the end of his miseries. The first was afraid of his last day, the other was longing for it. It came to both of them, but it didn't find them both alike; and because it didn't find them alike, it didn't come to them equally in the same way. Dying and dying was the same; ending this life and ending this life is their common condition. You've heard what they had in common; observe now where they separate. *For it happened that that destitute man died, and was taken away by angels into Abraham's bosom; but the rich man also died, and was buried* (Lk 16:22). The other one, you see, was possibly not even buried. You already know the rest; one was being tormented in hell, the other being entertained in Abraham's bosom. Those previous delights, those previous miseries have passed away; in each case there's been an end and a change; that one from delights to pains, this one from miseries to delights. Those delights, of course, and those miseries were short; while these pains and these delights that have replaced them are without end.

It's certainly not riches that were blamed in the rich man's case, nor poverty praised in the poor man's; but impiety was condemned in the one, piety praised in the other. Sometimes, you see, people hear these things in the gospel, and those who have nothing are delighted, the beggar is overjoyed at these words. "I," he says, "shall be in Abraham's bosom, not that rich man."

Let us answer the poor man: "It's not enough, your being covered with sores; add something to yourself for merit; choose also to be licked by the tongues of the dogs.<sup>7</sup> Because poverty with infidelity means both torment here and damnation there."

Let's also address the rich person: "When you heard the gospel about that man *who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and used to feast splendidly every day* (Lk 16:19), you were afraid. I don't object to your being afraid; but you should be more afraid of what was objected to there. He ignored the poor man lying at his gate, who for his part was longing for the scraps that fell from his table; no covering, no shelter, no humanity was shown him. That's what was punished in the rich man, callousness, unkindness, conceit, pride, infidelity; these are the things that were punished in the rich man.

"How can you prove that?" somebody says. "Of course it was riches that were punished."

If I, then, can't prove it from this very passage of the gospel, let nobody listen



to me. When that rich man was in torment in the underworld, he longed for a drop of water on his tongue from the finger of that poor man, who had longed for scraps from his table; and possibly he got the scraps more easily than the other got his drop of water; the drop of water, after all was refused him. Abraham, with the poor man in his bosom, answered him, *Remember, son, that you received your good things in your life* (Lk 16:25). This, you see, is what I have proposed to demonstrate, that it was impiety and infidelity that were condemned in him, not riches and affluence in the present. *You received*, he said, *your good things in your life*. What's *your good things*? You didn't think there were any other good things. What's *in your life*? You didn't believe there was any other life. So, your good things, not God's; in your life, not Christ's. Your good things in your life are what you received; what you believed is over and done with. The reason you haven't received the good things that are better, is that you refused to believe in them, while you were among the inferior sort.

*Augustine defends his interpretation of Abraham's words*

4. Perhaps I'm accusing this rich man, and explaining what our father Abraham meant just according to my own whim. To have it said more plainly, let what is wrapped up be unwrapped, what is shut away be seen openly, let the door be opened to those who are knocking. When he was denied the relief of even the slightest mercy,<sup>8</sup> to fulfill what is written, *Judgment without mercy upon the one who did not show mercy* (Jas 2:13), he begged that Lazarus should be sent to his brothers, and should tell them what goes on after this life. He was told it couldn't be done, but if they wanted not to come to the same place of torment, they should listen to Moses and the prophets. And he knew both himself and his brothers—his skeptical brothers, you see, were in the habit of muttering this sort of thing to each other, making fun of the divine utterances, when they heard something said in the law or the prophets that concerned the avoidance of eternal punishments and the desire for eternal rewards, of muttering and saying to each other, "Whoever rose again from there? Who has ever come back from there? Who has ever been able to tell us what goes on there? Ever since I buried my father, I have never heard his voice."

He knew this, that he himself had been in the habit of having that sort of conversation with his brothers, skeptical and cynical in heart and lips; so he had this request to make, that the thing should happen which they said never had happened, and that was why they made light of the divine utterances. And he said, "Let someone go from here and tell them."

And father Abraham answered, *They have Moses and the prophets there; let them listen to them*.

And he, remembering their conversations, said, *No, father Abraham*. As though to say, "I know the way we used to talk. *No, father Abraham*; I know what I'm saying, I know what I'm asking for." This despiser of the poor man, turned merciful too late, wishing a mercy to be shown his brothers that he hadn't shown to himself, *No*, he said, *no, father Abraham*; they don't believe Moses

and the prophets. I know, I was like that myself; *but if someone should come to them from the dead, they can believe.*

And father Abraham: *If they do not believe Moses and the prophets—they were Jews, after all, nor would he have said, “father Abraham,” unless he were a Jew. So father Abraham answered, If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded, even if someone should have risen from the dead (Lk 16:29-31).*

That’s what happened, it all came true. They didn’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they ignored the Lord rising again. Just as they stood out, you see, as despisers of Moses and the prophets, so in the same way they refused to listen to the Lord rising from the dead, against whom they even bought false witnesses. *We are giving you money, they said—to those guards at the tomb—and just say “his disciples came while we were asleep, and stole him” (Mt 28:12-13).* Sleeping witnesses, bought, corrupted, denying their own life, dreaming up strange thefts! If you were awake, why didn’t you arrest the thieves? If you were asleep, how did you see what happened?

*A further proof that it was not riches that were condemned in the rich man*

5. We have proved, I rather think, that it wasn’t riches being objected to with that rich man, but impiety, infidelity, pride, cruelty. Listen to an even better proof that it wasn’t riches that were objected to. Where was the rich man sunk? Into the torments of hell.<sup>9</sup> Where was the poor man lifted up? Into the bosom of Abraham. Look at the poor man in Abraham’s bosom. Abraham welcomed him, he was welcomed. This is the Abraham, who was the ancestor that believed. Add, and I would even say, read in the book of Genesis about the riches of Abraham, gold, silver, flocks, household;<sup>10</sup> Abraham was wealthy. Why are you objecting to the rich man? The rich man welcomed the poor man.

So then, far be it from us to object to riches, and still we mustn’t make that a reason for bolstering up avarice. The rich mustn’t start saying that I have spoken up for them; the rich mustn’t start saying that I have agreed to be their advocate. They felt afraid, after all, when reminded of the gospel; when they heard about the rich man hurled into the pains of hell, they felt afraid. I have reassured them; they needn’t fear riches, but vices;<sup>11</sup> they shouldn’t fear wealth, but avarice; they shouldn’t be afraid of goods, but of greed. Let them possess wealth like Abraham, and let them possess it with faith. Let them have it, possess it, and not be possessed by it.

Someone will say to me, “And how did Abraham possess it?”

Do you want to know how Abraham possessed it? What was there about him? Piety. What else? Faith. What else? Obedience. What else? Interior riches. Do you want to know? Do you want to be reminded of the reading which gives you the answer? Anything that any man thinks he has a good excuse for accumulating, he saves up for his children. So, seeing that all men save their riches for their children, and those who haven’t got children suffer painfully, because they

have nobody to whom they can leave what they have accumulated; so since it's obvious that all men love their children more than their riches, love those for whom they are saving up more than what they are saving up; do you want to know just how Abraham possessed that inheritance? Read how, at God's command, he was indifferent even to his heir. Set before your eyes a rich father; here the one who is saving up, there what he is saving up, there the one for whom he is saving it. Weigh each of them up, assign them their values, set love in order.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, he valued the one for whom he was saving up more than what he was saving.

If the Lord Jesus Christ were to say to this man, *If you wish to be perfect, go, sell everything you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come follow me* (Mt 18:21), I am to suppose, am I, that like that rich man in the gospel, even Abraham would have gone away sorrowful? He would have been sad to hear, "Give up your riches," though he was happy to hear, "Sacrifice your heir to me"? Sacrifice to me your only son, your beloved son; give me the son I gave you. He didn't hesitate, he had no qualms, he didn't darken his devotion with the clouds of sadness, neither the one who was going to sacrifice, nor the one who was to be sacrificed. Because the boy himself felt no alarm either under his father's sword. He was brought rejoicing to the place by his rejoicing father, he was bound, laid on the altar. Nor was there any hesitation; the father raised his right arm with the weapon; it wasn't trembling at all, not weak at all, nor was it lowered until so commanded by the one who had commanded it to be raised.

There you are, that's how you must possess your wealth, and possess whatever you have the power to; not to nourish various sorts of greed, but to carry out various works of kindness and piety, and so wait for the last day without anxiety; genuinely rich, inwardly rich; outwardly as best you can, inwardly as you have been commanded. Have you possessions? *The Lord has given*. Have you lost them? *The Lord has taken away*. Rejoice, because the one who has taken away hasn't taken himself away. Or isn't he enough for you, the one who made you?<sup>13</sup> *As it pleased the Lord, so has it come about*. Tell me, what are you afraid of? Since you are bad,<sup>14</sup> and he is good, does what is good please you, and what is bad please him? That can't be so. You must take on trust that what pleases the good one is good. *As it pleased the Lord, so has it come about; blessed be the name of the Lord* (Jb 1:21). *We know that for those who love God all things work together for good* (Rom 8:28).

#### NOTES

1. So Lambot and Perler. They suggest that this is one of two sermons, the other being Sermon 37, mentioned by Possidius in his *Index*, and preached according to Lambot on the same day, namely 17 July, the feast day of the Scillitan martyrs.

I personally find it hard to believe that after the mammoth Sermon 37 on the valiant woman, Prv 31:10-31, either Augustine or his congregation would have had the stamina for yet another sermon, in the same basilica, on the same day. The two sermons mentioned by Possidius could just as well have been this one and either 299D or 299F. Thus we could still accept Lambot's thesis that the list at that point of Possidius' *Index* is one of sermons all preached in Carthage during the summer of 397. But we would then have to transfer Sermon 37 to the year 413, where Perler locates 299D.

2. I have made two short sentences, with a slight alteration, out of one sentence that as it stands makes no sense (it is in the singular in the Latin): *Proinde qui amat hanc vitam, faciat, si post amando diuturnam non potest*; literally, "Accordingly, whoever loves this life, let him do/make, if after by loving long-lasting he cannot." I emend *post* to *potest*, and then read as follows: *Proinde . . . faciat, si potest, amando diuturnam. Non potest.*

3. Of the thirty years he has allotted you by way of example.

4. From the Acts of the Scillitan martyrs; this martyr's name was Donata. Calling her that most valiant woman is an allusion to Prv 31:10. See note 1.

5. See Rom 13:7. He says this in a grammatically very odd way: *Sua suis reddidit*, which, since *sua* and *suis* are parts of the reflexive possessive pronoun, should correctly mean, "She rendered what was her own to her own people." Evidently the reflexive possessive pronoun was ceasing to be very reflexive in popular Latin, and was on its way to becoming the simple possessive it is in the Romance languages.

6. The sermon now proceeds on what seems to be an entirely new tack, about the rich man and Lazarus, and about riches as such not being evil. I suspect it is all prompted by some feature in the Acts of the martyrs; perhaps some of them were wealthy citizens; perhaps some of their equally well-to-do Christian neighbors succumbed either to the blandishments or to the threats of the authorities. It doesn't seem likely that the infidel he is here addressing is thought of as the persecuting magistrate.

7. In Sermon 113A, 3 he talks of the poor man's humility in connection with his sores being licked by the dogs. In 113B, 4 he talks of Lazarus feeding the dogs—sharing his sores with them; so it can also represent the generosity of the poor sharing what little they have. When one thinks that dogs stand for gentiles, and Lazarus can stand for Christ, a whole further prospect of ingenious Augustinian figurative exegesis of the dogs licking Lazarus' sores opens before one. But I haven't yet found Augustine himself following that line.

8. Reading *subsidium vel exiguae misericordiae* instead of the text's . . . *vel exigua misericordia*, relief or the slightest mercy.

9. Another reversed negative; he says "into the hell of torments," *In inferno tormentorum*.

10. See Gn 13:2.

11. A play on words: *non divitias, sed vitia*.

12. An allusion to Sg 2:4, which in the Greek and Latin versions provided the Fathers and scholastics with their text for developing their teaching on the proper order of charity—who is to be loved before whom.

13. Reading *qui te facit* instead of the text's *qui te facit*, the one who makes you.

14. See Lk 11:13.

## SERMON 299F

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE HOLY SCILLITAN MARTYRS

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

*Martyrs are witnesses to the truth that there is another life,  
which is to be preferred to this one*

1. This solemn feast day is calling for something about the martyrs of Christ, that is about the witnesses of Christ, who were not ashamed to confess his name before men.<sup>2</sup> May the one who said to them, *Do not think what to say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you what you ought to say* (Lk 12:11-12), give me something to say to you which is to your advantage.

“Martyrs,” a Greek word, are called “witnesses” in English. So the holy martyrs, not false but true witnesses, bore witness with their blood to there being another life infinitely to be preferred to this life, which being so fleeting they bravely made light of. You heard the confessions of the martyrs whose feast is celebrated today, when they were recited. Of the constancy that glowed in them, the longing for the kingdom of heaven which showed in the fire of their words, of where they were when they were being tried, of the one to whom they clung, from whom they doubtless drew what they should say, well we cannot recollect all of it, so let us at least call some of it to mind.

*To deny Christ would be to bear false witness*

2. Recall, dearly beloved, how the judge who was trying them called their confession “a persuasion of vanity,” to which one of them replied, *The persuasion of vanity is to commit murder, to bear false witness.*<sup>3</sup> What in these two things is to be understood as a persuasion of vanity? Evil, of course. I mean, weren’t the things that vanity persuaded people to do evil? It was not for nothing, however, that that man, who had been forewarned not to think what to say, because he was going to receive it at the right moment from the Holy Spirit, not without reason that he mentioned those two things. That, after all, is what it was all about. The whole case in a nutshell. *The persuasion of vanity*, he said, *is to commit murder, to bear false witness.* That is to say: “*You want to commit*

*murder, and you're forcing me to bear false witness." To deny Christ, of course, is to bear false witness.*

Say that Christ is not God, and that the ones we worship are gods.

Each statement is false; on the one hand he is God, on the other they are not gods.

Deny what you believe.

What you don't wish me to have on my lips, take from my heart. But why forbid me to express what you cannot suppress in my heart? One who is a true witness expresses outwardly what he has in mind inwardly. You see, I heard from the apostle, or rather from Christ through the apostle, *With the heart one believes unto justice, with the lips confession is made unto salvation* (Rom 10:10).

But the mocker of truth, the lover of vanity, says, "How is it unto salvation that confession is made with the lips? They speak and they die. How is it unto salvation that they speak, seeing that when they speak they are put to death? If they didn't speak, they wouldn't be put to death."

How? Confession is made unto a salvation which those who were giving testimony could see, those who were trying to terrify them with death could not see. The adversary, you see, was threatening that he would deprive them of salvation or well-being; but they could see another well-being, which they were going to receive and never going to lose. Fixing their gaze on that made them strong and brave, and fired by its beauty they thought nothing of this fleeting well-being, which we have in common with cattle.

Well-being shared with the angels is one thing, well-being shared with the beasts another. We human beings are in the middle. We have something that makes us like angels. What do we have? Minds, reason, intelligence, wisdom. What do we have like the beasts? Flesh, weakness, neediness, mortality. Let us fix our gaze on those things, ignore these. Let us love those, spurn these. Those last, these pass. It will come, the well-being or salvation promised by the savior himself, who taught us by his death to make light of this sort, and by his resurrection taught us what those who think nothing of this sort should really be in love with.

I was given a complete demonstration of this in my Lord. I was given a complete demonstration of this in the Word, which *became flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14). The reason, you see, he agreed to have flesh for us, was to show us in the very flesh which he took to himself from us what we should love, what we should think nothing of. After all, there was no blood in the Word which he could shed for us; no death, after all, in life. *The life, you see, was the light of men* (Jn 1:4). So from where, then, the blood, from where the death, from where his passion endured for us, but from the fact that *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*? He had all this from what belonged to us, while giving us great things from what belonged to him.

We knew how to die; we didn't have anything to live on. We had been left poor, you see, on this earth. This, I mean, is what is usually said about the really poor: "He's really poor, he doesn't have anything to live on." We were all like

that, both poor and rich, we were all like that. I mean even the rich who are ignorant of eternal life don't have anything to live on. Now look at us, sons of man, below; the Word, the Son of God, above. We on the one hand had nothing to live on, he on the other nothing to die from. The Word, the only-begotten Son of God, equal to the Father and coeternal, there he is above, we below. Sons of men, mortal, without resource, destitute, timid,<sup>4</sup> greedy, properly sad, vainly happy, we had nothing to live on, and he had nothing to die from. What did he receive from us, what did he give us? He received from us something to die from. He gave us something to live on. *The Word, you see, became flesh, and dwelt among us.* Though he was the Son of God, he became the Son of man. He experienced hunger in order to feed us, thirst in order to fill us, he slept in order to arouse us, he was weary on the road in order to offer himself to the weary as their food for the journey;<sup>5</sup> finally he was treated with dishonor in order to honor us, he died in order to give us life.

*The martyrs were not worried at being told, "If you confess Christ, you will be punished," because they had in mind, "A false witness will not go unpunished"*

3. This is what true witnesses held on to; with their minds they could perceive his gifts to come. That's why they made light of all things that pass away; *Vain is salvation from man* (Ps 60:11). The reason he wasn't frightened when he was told, "If you confess Christ, you will be punished," is that he had in mind, *A false witness will not go unpunished* (Prv 19:5).<sup>6</sup> These blessed saints spoke the truth, and were put to death. Well, so what? If nobody had put them to death, would they still be alive? How much better that bearing witness to the truth should do what a fever was going to do a little later on in any case! The result of sparing this life is the loss of the true life. The result of this passing life being spared, is that eternal life is not obtained.

Come and buy, you rich, come and buy, you poor. Nobody should say, "I've nothing to buy with, I'm too poor." The one who is up for sale gives you what he can be bought with. He tells you, "I will live in you, so that you may have the means to buy me; confess me, and you will possess me."

*May the holy martyrs pray for us that we may imitate their virtues*

4. May the holy martyrs pray for us that we should not only celebrate their feasts but also imitate their virtues. Let us love their confession of faith, let us applaud their crowns, and let us not despair. We too, after all, are human just like them, we too were created by the same one as they were. We share one and the same fountain, one and the same store from which to be fed and from which to drink, and in a word on which to live. No one should say, "He could do it, I can't." How could he do it? What could he have done, if it hadn't been granted him by the one who said, *Without me you can do nothing* (Jn 15:5)? That's why the apostle says, *Who will separate us, he says, from the love of God? Tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or*

*the sword? As it is written, that for your sake we are being put to death all day long (Rom 8:35).*

What a good cause! *For your sake we are being put to death all day long*; that's why fruitfully, that's why happily, because *for your sake*. It's because it's a good cause that a crown is awarded. *For your sake we are being put to death all day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter (Ps 44:22)*. Those who were being slaughtered wholesale, and were being sacrificed by people who didn't know what they were doing,<sup>7</sup> were being publicly strewn on the ground and secretly crowned.

*For your sake we are being put to death all day long*

5. *For your sake we are being put to death all day long (Ps 44:22)*. What power charity has she tells us herself; for your sake she came from the Spirit of God. Secular cupidity is from the world, not from God, and she too is strong in her own sphere. How much people are ready to suffer for the sake of money, how many dangerous hazards! They commit themselves to the waves, to storms. They are prepared to die in order not to live in poverty. And yet out of love of life, when it begins to be endangered, they throw everything overboard. Whatever they are carrying, they throw it into the sea, and in order to stay alive they jettison what they have to live on. At that point life is sweet, and is preferred to money; but when the seafarer has escaped, stripped to the bone, he reproaches God: "Look what a pass you've brought me to; why didn't you drown me in the sea?" Crazy fellow, that's not what you asked for when your life was in danger.

Look at the things the lovers of money endure for their beloved. Some wear themselves out with toil, and break down under their labors; others are butchered by bandits, others drowned in the waves, others perish in a variety of deaths. They too can say to money what the martyrs say to Wisdom: *For your sake we are being put to death all day long*. They can certainly use exactly the same words: *for your sake we are being put to death all day long*; but they say them to something that doesn't hear. And if it could hear, and if it could understand, and if it could reply, it would probably correct you and say to you, "Crazy fellow, Wisdom will say to the martyrs, When you die for my sake, you will have me. I, however, say to you, When you die for my sake you lose both yourself and me."

## NOTES

1. No date is suggested by the editor of this sermon, Dom Lambot. It is a somewhat incoherent sermon in places; it could well come from Augustine's later years, after 425. It doesn't lack force, certainly, but it does at times read like the ramblings of an old man; probably preaching on his home ground of Hippo Regius.

2. See Mt 10:32; Lk 9:26.



3. From the Acts of the martyrs. The speaker was probably called Speratus; he seems to have been the group's spokesman.

4. So the manuscript: *timidi*. The edited text has *tumidi*, conceited.

5. *Se viaticum*. This is a correction of the manuscript's *sevitiam*, which could, however, more economically be emended to *se viam*, as their road; see Jn 14:6.

6. As this sentence is suddenly in the singular, it is probably a reference to an episode in the Acts of the martyrs.

7. See Lk 23:34.

## SERMON 300

### ON THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MACCABEE MARTYRS

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

*The people of God was Christian before Christ, in fact if not in name*

1. The glory of the Maccabees<sup>2</sup> has made this day into a very special feast day for us; when the marvelous account of their sufferings was read to us, we not only heard about them, but could practically see them as spectators. These things happened a long time ago, before the incarnation, before the passion of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. These martyrs emerged in that first people, which produced the prophets who foretold these present realities.<sup>3</sup> Nor should anyone suppose that before there was a Christian people, God had no people. On the contrary, if I may so put it, as is indeed really the case, though it's not the usual way of talking, the people of that time too was Christian.

I mean, it wasn't only after his passion that Christ began to have his people; his too was the people born of Abraham, to whom the Lord himself bore witness when he said, *Abraham longed to see my day; he saw it and rejoiced* (Jn 8:56). So it was from Abraham that that people was born, which was enslaved in Egypt, and which was delivered from the house of bondage with a mighty arm through Moses, God's servant, was led through the Red Sea as the waves sank away, tried and tested in the desert, subjected to the law, established in the kingdom.<sup>4</sup> From that people, as I said, arose the prophets, from there these martyrs blossomed. Christ indeed had not yet died; but Christ who was going to die made them martyrs, witnesses to himself.

*These martyrs were Christians, though they suffered for the law of Moses in the way that the later martyrs suffered for the name of Christ*

2. So the first thing I must impress upon your graces is that when you are admiring these martyrs, you shouldn't think they weren't Christians. They were Christians; but with their deeds they anticipated the name Christian that was publicized much later on. But yes, it's true, as though it wasn't Christ they were confessing, they were not being forced by the godless king and persecutor to deny Christ, which the later martyrs were forced to do, and didn't, and so

obtained a similar glory. Subsequent persecutors of the Christian people, you see, were compelling those they persecuted to deny the name of Christ; those who persisted most steadfastly in the name of Christ suffered the same sort of things as we heard that these did, when the account was read. So those more recent martyrs, by whose blood in their thousands the earth has been empurpled, were being commanded and told by the persecutors, "Deny Christ." When they didn't do it, they suffered the same sort of things as these did. These though were being told, "Deny the law of Moses." They didn't; they suffered for the law of Moses. Those for the name of Christ, these for the law of Moses.

*The Old Testament is the veiling or concealing of the New,  
the New Testament is the unveiling or revealing of the Old*

3. Some Jew steps forward and says to us, "How can you reckon these people of ours to be your martyrs? How can you be so unwise<sup>5</sup> as to celebrate their memory? Read their confessions; see whether they confessed Christ."

To whom we reply, "It's true, you are one of those who did not believe in Christ, and being broken off from the olive remained withered outside, when the wild olive took your place;<sup>6</sup> what are you going to say, being one of those faithless people? They weren't openly confessing Christ, because the mystery of Christ was still concealed behind a veil. The Old Testament, you see, is the veiling of the New Testament, and the New Testament is the unveiling of the Old Testament. So about the unbelieving Jews, your ancestors, but in evil your brothers, about such as they see what the apostle Paul has to say: *All the time Moses is read until now, a veil has been placed over their hearts. Now the same veil remains in the reading of the Old Testament, which is not being unveiled, since it is being made void in Christ. When you pass over, he says, to Christ, the veil will be taken away* (2 Cor 3:14-16)."

*The veil, he says, remains in the reading of the Old Testament, which is not being unveiled, since it is being made void in Christ; not the reading of the Old Testament, but the veil which has been placed there. The reading of the Old Testament, indeed, is not being made void, but is being fulfilled by the one who said, I did not come to abrogate the law, but to fulfill it* (Mt 5:17). So the veil is being made void, in order that what was obscure might be understood. This, of course, was still shut away, a closed book, because the key of the cross was not yet available.<sup>7</sup>

*How Christ in his passion deliberately fulfilled  
even minor points of Old Testament prophecy*

4. To clinch the matter, turn your attention to the Lord's passion, set him before your eyes hanging on the tree, and lying down like a lion when he wished,<sup>8</sup> and in order to slay death, dying not of necessity but as an act of power. Notice this very point; see how he said on the cross, *I thirst* (Jn 19:28). And when the Jews,<sup>9</sup> ignorant of what was being enacted by means of them, of what

was being fulfilled by the hands of the ignorant, bound a sponge with vinegar in it to a reed and gave it to him to suck on, he sipped the vinegar and answered, *It is accomplished. And bowing his head he gave up the spirit* (Jn 19:30). Does anyone set out on a journey as calmly, as deliberately, as he departed this life? With as much straightforwardness, as much authority as this man who had said, *I have the authority to lay down my life, and the authority to take it up again. Nobody can take it from me, but I myself lay it aside from myself, and take it up again* (Jn 10:17-18)? Anyone who reflects worthily on his authority as he dies will acknowledge his kingship and his kingdom as he lives.

Now he had already said this to the Jews themselves through the prophet: *I myself went to sleep* (Ps 3:5). As though to say, “Why do you people pride yourselves on my death? Why do you indulge in vain boasting, as though you had overcome me? *I myself went to sleep*. I myself have gone to sleep, because I wished to, not because you have raged against me. I myself have fulfilled what I wished; as for you, you have remained in your crime.”<sup>10</sup> So having received and sipped the vinegar, he said, *It is accomplished*.

What is accomplished?

“What has been written about me.”

What was written about him?

*They gave me gall for my food, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink* (Ps 69:21).

So as he looked round at all the things that had been enacted in the course of his passion: those people had already wagged their heads in front of the cross,<sup>11</sup> already given him gall,<sup>12</sup> already counted his bones as he was hanging there, stretched out; his garments had already been divided up, and they had cast lots for his indivisible tunic;<sup>13</sup> so having looked round and after a fashion counted up all the things that the prophets had foretold about his passion, he noticed that goodness knows what still remained, some lesser point: *And in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink*. In order that this small point that remained might be added to the list, he said, *I thirst*. And on receiving this lesser thing, he answered, *It is accomplished*. Having said that, *he bowed his head and gave up the spirit* (Jn 19:28-30).

Then the foundations of the earth were shaken, then the rocks were split open and the secrets of the underworld laid bare, then the tombs gave up the dead; and, to state the point which everything I have said has been leading up to, because now was the time for everything that was veiled in the Old Testament to be unveiled and revealed in the mystery of the cross, the veil of the temple was torn away.<sup>14</sup>

*In dying for the law of Moses, these martyrs died for Christ*

5. So from that moment Christ began to be proclaimed quite openly after the resurrection. The things that had been prophetically foretold began to be evidently fulfilled in him;<sup>15</sup> the martyrs began to confess him with the greatest constancy. The martyrs confessed plainly the same one as the Maccabees at that

earlier time confessed in a hidden manner; the former died for Christ unveiled in the gospel, while the latter died for the name of Christ veiled in the law. Christ possesses both, Christ came to the aid of both as they fought the good fight, Christ crowned both. Christ has them both in his service, like some Very Important Person traveling along with a troop of attendants, some going in front, others following behind. So fix your gaze on him rather, as he presides in the chariot of the flesh;<sup>16</sup> both those who march ahead are attentive to him, and those who follow behind are devoted to him.

I mean, to show you, and to show you clearly, that those who died for the law of Moses died for Christ, listen to Christ himself, my dear Jew, listen; and may your heart at last be opened, may the veil be lifted from your eyes. *If you believed Moses, you would also believe me.* Listen to that, accept it if you can. "If the veil has been lifted by me, open your eyes and see."<sup>17</sup> *If you believed Moses, he said, you would also believe me; for it was about me that he wrote (Jn 5:46).* If it was about Christ that Moses wrote, those who truly died for the law of Moses laid down their lives for Christ. *It was about me, he said, that he wrote.* He was served by the tongues of those who confessed him, served also by the reed pen of those who wrote the truth about him. How will you people be able to understand the reed Moses wrote with, seeing you put vinegar on a reed?<sup>18</sup> If only you would eventually drink the wine of the one, to whom as an insult you offered vinegar to drink!

*A basilica very properly dedicated to the Maccabees in Antioch*

6. So the Maccabees really are martyrs of Christ. That's why it is not unsuitable, not in the least improper, but on the contrary absolutely right for their day and their solemnity to be celebrated especially by Christians. What do the Jews know about such a celebration? Word is going round<sup>19</sup> that there is a basilica of the Holy Maccabees in Antioch; in the very city, that is to say, which is called by the name of that persecuting king.<sup>20</sup> They endured the persecution of the wicked king Antiochus, and the memory of their martyrdom is celebrated in Antioch, so that both the name of the one who persecuted and the memory of the one who crowned them are heard together.<sup>21</sup> This basilica is owned by Christians, was built by Christians. It's we who keep, we who celebrate their memory; it's among us that thousands of holy martyrs throughout the world have imitated their sufferings.

So nobody need hesitate, my brothers and sisters, to imitate the Maccabees, in case while imitating the Maccabees, you should think you weren't imitating Christians. Of course, of course, we should cherish a fervent desire to imitate them in our hearts. Let men learn how to die for the sake of the truth. Let women learn from the extraordinary patience, the inexpressible courage of that mother; she really did know how to keep and preserve her sons.<sup>22</sup> She knew how to keep them, because she was not afraid of losing them. Each of them suffered by feeling pain in himself; she, by seeing what was done, suffered in all of them. Becoming the mother of seven martyrs, she was herself seven times a martyr;

not separated from her sons as she watched, and added to her sons as she died.<sup>23</sup> She watched them all dying, she loved them all; she endured in her eyes what they all endured in the flesh. Not only was she not terrorized, she even encouraged them.

*The story of the mother's last son*

7. The persecutor Antiochus thought of this woman as a mother like other mothers. "Persuade your son," he said, "not to perish." And she said,<sup>24</sup> "I will certainly persuade my son to live, by encouraging him to die; you, though, want to persuade him to die by sparing himself." But what a little speech it was, how full of family feeling, how motherly, how evenly balanced between spiritual and carnal considerations! *Son, take pity on me. Son*, she said, *take pity on me, who bore you for nine months in my womb; I gave you milk for three years, and brought you up to this age; take pity on me* (2 Mac 7:27).

They were all expecting words like the following: "Give your consent to the king, don't abandon your mother." She on the contrary said, "Give your consent to God, don't abandon your brothers. If you seem to abandon me, that's when you don't abandon me. I will find you there, where I will not have to fear losing you anymore. Christ will keep you for me there, and Antiochus won't take you away from me there." He feared God, listened to his mother, answered the king, clung to his brothers, drew his mother after him.

## NOTES

1. The seven brothers and their mother, of 2 Mac 7, were celebrated on 1 August.
2. These brothers and their mother were not really Maccabees; that name properly belongs, in fact, only to one man, Judas Maccabeus (it means The Hammer), who was the most outstanding leader of the Jews in their revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes from 167 BC onward. See 1 Mac 3:1. But these are called Maccabees, because their story is told in 2 Mac 7—and no doubt because their own names are not in fact mentioned.
3. *Haec praesentia*. He could also mean the martyrdom of the seven brothers, "present" through the account of it being read in the church. But there is no suggestion which prophecy had foretold this event. So it is more likely that he means the present reality of the Christian Churches, and of course the ever present reality of Christ, his incarnation, passion, and glorification, manifested in the Church.
4. A rather odd word to use for the promised land of Canaan; but that was a type of the kingdom of God.
5. Unwise, because thereby you are giving the game away to us: *qua imprudentia*. I was tempted to emend it to *qua impudentia*: how can you be so shameless as to celebrate their memory. But this would be a slightly less telling point to make.
6. See Rom 11:17.
7. At the time of the Maccabees.
8. See Gn 49:9, in the light of Jn 10:18.

9. In fact a Roman soldier—the sort of little detail Augustine was often rather too casual about in his polemics.

10. See Jn 8:21; 9:41.

11. See Ps 22:7; Mk 15:29.

12. See Ps 69:21; Mt 27:34.

13. See Ps 22:17-18; Mk 15:24; Jn 19:23-24.

14. See Mt 27:51-52.

15. These things are now the prophecies concerning the Church and its worldwide establishment.

16. The scene he has in mind is that above all of a Roman general celebrating a triumph.

17. This is surely Christ speaking, not Augustine in his own person.

18. *Calamus*, meaning primarily a reed, or cane, and then a pen made from a reed.

19. *Praedicatur*—literally, it is being publicly announced. This may suggest that the basilica in Antioch was only recently dedicated to them. That could help to date this sermon, if any historians and archaeologists can discover anything about such a basilica in that city.

20. Actually by the name of his ancestor, Antiochus I, son of Seleucus I, who founded the city in 300 BC. The persecuting king was Antiochus IV Epiphanes, over 100 years later.

21. Both the meaning and the logic of this sentence escapes me.

22. By encouraging them to die bravely, and not yield either to the blandishments or the tortures of the executioners. See 2 Mac 7 throughout.

23. The text, 2 Mac 7:41, simply says, *Last of all the mother died, after her sons, without saying she was put to death like them.* But that is presumably implied.

24. Not out loud, of course!

## SERMON 301

### ON THE FEAST OF THE HOLY MACCABEES

Date: 417<sup>1</sup>

*The wonderful example of the mother of the Maccabees*

1. A tremendous spectacle has been set before the eyes of our faith. We heard with our ears, we saw with our imaginations this mother actually choosing that her sons should end this life before herself; a wish clean contrary to normal human feelings. I mean, people always want to precede their children in departing from this life, not to follow them; she though preferred to die after them. She wasn't losing her sons, you see, but sending them on ahead.<sup>2</sup> Nor was she considering what life they were ending, but what one they were beginning. They were ceasing, after all, to live where they were sooner or later going to die anyhow; and they were beginning to live a life they were going to live without end.

What has really astounded us is not just that she was a spectator of their deaths, but that she was actually urging them on. More fruitful of virtues than of offspring; seeing them battling, she was herself battling in them all, herself winning in all of them as they won. One woman, one mother, how she set before our eyes our one mother, holy Church, everywhere urging her children to die for the name of the one by whom she conceived and bore them! In this way the world has been filled with the blood of the martyrs, and from the seed thus broadcast it has yielded the crops of the Church. How have human beings been capable of this, if not because *the salvation of the just is from the Lord, and he is their protector in time of trouble* (Ps 37:39)?

*A comparison of the Maccabees with the three holy children of Daniel 3*

2. We have seen, we know that the Lord was the protector in time of trouble of those three men who were walking about among the harmless flames, and praising the Lord without any injuries. Where man was raging against them, the fire was sparing them. We have seen, we know how the salvation of those just men was from the Lord, so that they should be cast into the fire, and should convert by remaining alive the fierce king whom they had infuriated by their



words. He came to believe, after all, in their God, and issued an edict that anyone who blasphemed the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego should be annihilated, and his house pulled down. How different a command from the first command! What was the first command? Let them perish, any who do not adore the golden statue. What was the second? Let them perish, any who blaspheme the true God.<sup>3</sup> Men of faith who didn't change themselves, brought about change in a man who lacked faith. They did not allow him to stay in his faithlessness, because they themselves stood firm in their faith.

So their salvation was manifestly from the Lord. When they were not being burned up, and were praising him, the Lord was present. When these others were being burned, were confessing, and yet dying all the same, where was the Lord? Or perhaps those were just, and these were sinners? After all, we heard them a short while ago, when their Passion was being read, confessing their sins, and saying that they were suffering all those things because God was angry with them, and also for the sins of their fathers.<sup>4</sup> But what about the first lot? Read, and you will see that they too confessed their own sins, and said they deserved to suffer.<sup>5</sup> Equally just, equally ready to confess their sins; and just, precisely because equally ready to confess their sins. Faultless, precisely because not given to falsehood. *For if we say, says John, that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to purify us from all iniquity* (1 Jn 1:8-9). It is the mark of the just to confess their sins; it is the mark of the proud to defend their merits. So both groups were equally just in confessing their sins, equally so in giving glory to God, equally so in being ready to die for his laws.

Why were the former delivered from the flames, the latter consumed by the flames? So God was present with those, had deserted these? Perish the thought! On the contrary, he was present with both groups; with those openly, with these secretly. He was visibly delivering those, invisibly crowning these. Those indeed were delivered from death; but they remained among the trials and temptations of this life; delivered from the fire, they were preserved to face other dangers; having defeated one tyrant, they were still going to have to wrestle with the devil.

My brothers and sisters, you must have a Christian understanding of the matter. The Maccabees were in fact granted a better and a safer deliverance. By those three men it was only one trial that was successfully surmounted, while others still remained; for these it was this life that was over and done with, the whole of which is one long trial.<sup>6</sup> Then again, by a divine judgment, inscrutable undoubtedly, but still just, Nebuchadnezzar was found worthy to be converted, Antiochus was found worthy to be hardened.<sup>7</sup> The former found mercy, the latter grew prouder than ever.

*To say you don't know what comes after this life is at least better than to say there is nothing after this life*

3. But how much and to what extent did he grow prouder than ever? *I have seen the godless lift himself up over the cedars of Lebanon.* How much? For

how long? *I passed on, and behold, he was not; I sought him, and his place was not to be found* (Ps 37:35-36). Good; you've sought him, and not found him; that's because you have passed on. Do you want to see that the godless is not? Do you want to seek him and not find his place? Pass on. What do I mean, "Pass on"? Don't panic—I didn't say, "Die." I mean, you thought I was saying, "Pass on from this life"; and that's why you felt panic, because you haven't passed on. What does that mean, you haven't passed on? You haven't passed on, by lifting up the heart, beyond the allurements of temporal felicity; you haven't passed on beyond the blandishments of the flesh, you haven't passed on beyond the suggestions of the age that tickle the fancy and fill the heart with fear of human misfortunes. That's why you imagine there is such a thing as felicity in this world, and don't consider there is such a thing as calamity in this world.

The felicity of the kingdom of heaven hasn't touched your heart, a refreshing breeze from there hasn't cooled your fevered desires. When you're told, "The felicity of the world is false," even though you dare not say so, I can still see it in your heart, you curl your lip perhaps, you sneer, you mock, and you say to yourself, "Oh, if only all was well with me here! What's coming afterward, I don't know." And yes, that is something, anyway, that at least you say, "I don't know"; to preserve you from possibly even going so far as to say this: *Brief and tedious is the time of our life, and there is no coming back at a man's end, and there is none who has been known to have returned from the underworld* (Wis 2:1). At least say, "I don't know." Admission of ignorance is a step toward knowledge.

So let me talk to you like this; as though you were to say to me, "I don't know what's coming after death; I haven't the slightest idea whether the just are going to be blessed, and sinners miserable; or whether both kinds are equally not going to exist."

Still, although you don't know that, you won't dare to say that after death sinners are going to be blessed, the just going to be miserable. You can't say, even though you suspect they are equally not going to exist, that all the same the godless are going to be in a better condition, and the just are going to be in an evil case after death. Not even your ignorance could suggest such a thing to you. So you can say, "Whether all is well after death for the just, and things are bad for the godless after death, or whether both sorts will equally be lacking in conscious awareness, I don't know. Oh, if only all were well with me here, while I'm alive, while I'm conscious!" You can see that you haven't yet passed on. These thoughts of yours, I'm saying, these earthy, dusty, smoky, steamy, fleshly, mortal thoughts of yours, you haven't yet passed on beyond them. That's why it seems to you that the godless has lifted himself above the cedars of Lebanon; that's why you look for his place, and you find him; it's because you haven't passed on beyond.

*On the place of the wicked here in this world*

4. You look for his place, and you find it; but here. He has his place in this age and world. It wouldn't, after all, be to no purpose that he was created by the

foreknowledge of God, or to no purpose that he was reared, or to no purpose that the sun rose on him and the rain poured down on him,<sup>8</sup> or to no purpose that in his ill-will and his bad life he was spared by God's infinite patience. None of this is pointless; he has his place here. Even if we ourselves can't discover the reasons for all of it, still it's all known to God, who knows how to arrange everything.

Look, not to mention anything else; look what sort of place this wretched Antiochus had here. It was through him that the people of God was scourged and tested; through him that these holy young men were crowned. So he had his place here. He was evil; but the one who cannot be evil made good use of him. Just as bad men, you see, make bad use of good creatures; so the good creator makes good use of bad men. The one who created the whole human race knew what to do with that sort. The goldsmith brings his material, the goldsmith weighs it, the goldsmith balances it.<sup>9</sup> The painter knows where to put the color black, for the whole picture to be beautiful; and does God not know where to put the sinner, for his whole creation to be rightly ordered?

Unless God in his patience had preserved the sinners of previous ages, where would all the faithful of today be born from? Some bad people are preserved, so that good people may be born of them. Good by God's grace; because the whole lump of sin has been condemned.<sup>10</sup> What could be more wicked than the devil? And how much good God has brought out of his wickedness! The blood of the redeemer would not have been shed for our salvation, but for the wickedness of the deserter.<sup>11</sup> Read the gospel, and see what's written there: *The devil put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ* (Jn 13:2). The devil is bad, Judas is bad; like organist, like organ. So the devil made bad use of his own instrument; the Lord made good use of them both. So they directed their energies toward our ruin; God was pleased to turn them to our salvation.

*Christ handed over both by Judas and by God*

5. Judas handed Christ over, and was condemned. Judas handed him over, and he's condemned; the Father handed over the Son, and he's glorified. Judas, I repeat, handed over his master, and is condemned; the Son handed over himself, and is praised. We all know how Judas handed over, or betrayed<sup>12</sup> Christ; you are doubtless waiting to hear how the Father handed over the Son. This too you know; but I will remind you, so that you may remember. Listen to the apostle saying about God the Father, *Who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all* (Rom 8: 32). Listen to him too about the Son: *Who loved me, he says, and handed himself over for my sake* (Gal 2:20). Now you can see two handers over; the Father handing over the Son, the Son handing over himself; each of them, though, savior, because each of them creator. So what did Judas do? I mean, what good did he do? He didn't do any good, good was done through him. Judas didn't say, after all, "I will hand Christ over, so that the human race may be set free." In Judas it was greed that did the handing over;<sup>13</sup> in God it was mercy. Judas was simply paid back for what he did, not for what God did through him.

*No place for the wicked in the next life*

6. Why have I said all this? Because there is indeed a place for the godless in this age; and *God certainly knows who are his* (2 Tm 2:19); and he knows what to do for them by means of those who are not his. But you, if you pass on, if you trample on earthly things, if it's not for nothing you answer that you have lifted up your heart; in passing on you will look for the place of the godless, and you won't find it. In that future life, after all, what place is there for the godless? Will we still have any need to be exercised by bad people? Does gold still need to be purified by means of straw? The whole world, you see, is the goldsmith's furnace. In it the just are like gold; in it the godless are like straw. In it tribulation is like fire; in it God is like the goldsmith. The godly praise God, the gold gleams; the godless blaspheme God, the straw smokes. In one and the same tribulation, as in one and the same fire, the first is being purified, the second laid waste. But God the goldsmith is being praised in both of them.

*The godly should not be upset by the worldly prosperity of the godless*

7. Let me say something, dearly beloved, to encourage both you and myself. With the Lord's help let us pass on beyond the thoughts of the flesh, let us lift our hearts up above, let us think about the life to come; when your heart is really there, you have really passed on. Where is the godless? He won't be there. Here he was necessary; there you will look for him, and you won't find his place. So when you see, brothers and sisters, you that live by faith, whose hearts are upright, who are hoping for the life to come, the only true life, and for everlasting felicity; when you see people rejoicing and enjoying themselves in this false and deceptive felicity, if you are godly, grieve, if you are in your right minds, weep.

It was in this way, you see, that that man whose feet were shaken blamed himself, because he had started to find fault with God and was already on the point of doing so; but he was almost on the point of it, wasn't quite there yet. He didn't deny that God knew;<sup>14</sup> but he staggered, as if his feet were shaken. What does it mean to stagger? To doubt. When he blamed himself, though, for not having an upright heart, what did he say? "Why were my feet disturbed? *Because I was envious*, he said, *of sinners, seeing the peace of sinners* (Ps 73:1-3). Because I saw that the wicked were rich, I envied them; and I said I have lost out on justice, and *for no reason have I made my heart just, and washed my hands among the innocent* (Ps 73:13). And while I am in doubt, this is how I have begun to understand."

*This is how I have begun*, he says, *to understand this; there is toil ahead of me*. Great toil, to solve this problem. It really is hard labor. All is well with that one, and he's a bad man; all goes badly with this one, and he's a good man; and over them both is God the judge. So the just judge is giving good things to bad people, bad things to good people. *There is toil ahead of me*. But for how long is the toil there? *Until I enter into the sanctuary of God, and understand about*

*the last things* (Ps 73:16-17). So if you understand about the last things, you will enjoy the quiet rest of discovery, the toil of inquiry will be over and done with.

*The understanding of the last things*

8. Understand about the last things, where no bad person will be fortunate or happy, no good person unfortunate and unhappy. What does he go on to say, I mean? *For what is there for me in heaven?* Later on I knew what there is for me in heaven, when I entered into the sanctuary of God, and understood about the last things. *For what is there for me in heaven?* Imperishable eternity, immortality, no grief, no fear, no end to bliss. So *what is there for me in heaven?* What is being kept for me in heaven? *And from you what have I desired on earth?* (Ps 73:25). For what is there for me in heaven? What indeed? Can I say what? When shall I ever explain what there is? That's why he said this out of a sense of wonder, not with the intention of explaining. *For what is there for me?* he said.

Why don't you say what?

How can I say *what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it come up into the heart of man* (1 Cor 2:9)?

Trample on what there is down below, because it is nothing; hope for what there is above, because it cannot be explained. And having this sort of faith, don't be envious of sinners, when you see them apparently enjoying good fortune, because it's not true they are fortunate, in reality they are unfortunate. And as for you, *rejoice in the Lord* (Ps 32:11). And if you happen to have for a time riches, honors, offices of authority, don't imagine that you are thereby fortunate and happy.

For anyone who knows how to rejoice in the Lord, and understands about the last things, worldly felicity is not a guerdon but a burden.<sup>15</sup> The person who is fortunate in worldly terms is in great danger of being corrupted by that good fortune, not in body but in soul. Because this good fortune is false, unreal. Such people,<sup>16</sup> even if they seem to be something in this world, do not rejoice at it, but they take delight in the commandments of the Lord. Then what God commands is preferred to the world, both when it's coaxing and when it's threatening; everything visible is trampled on, they pass on beyond; it's by thinking, not by walking, that they pass on beyond. I didn't say everything visible; it's easy, after all, to pass on beyond what you are treading on; but I meant, they pass on beyond everything changeable. Because whatever is visible is changeable, but not everything that's changeable is visible, since even the spirit is changeable, and yet it's invisible. Pass on beyond what can be seen, pass on also beyond what cannot be seen, and yet can change, in order to come to him who can neither be seen nor change. When you come to him, you will be coming to God.

*The shortness of life*

9. But now at this time walk by faith, adjust your style of life to it. He is ever so high above; take good care of your wings. Believe what you can't yet see, so

that you may earn the right to see what you believe. Let us live like foreign expatriates, let us think of ourselves as transients passing through, and we will sin the less. Let us rather give thanks to the Lord our God, because he has decreed that the last day of this life should both be coming shortly and be uncertain. From the first moments of infancy to decrepit old age is a very short space of time. He lived such a long time,<sup>17</sup> but what good would it have been to Adam, even if he had died today? What is long, if it has an end?

Nobody can call back yesterday; today has tomorrow hard on its heels, to make it pass on. In this small space of time let us live good lives, in order to<sup>18</sup> go to him, from whom there is no passing on. Even now while we are talking, we are of course passing on. The words run on, they fly from the mouth; so too our actions, so too our honors, so too our misfortunes, so too this good fortune of ours. It's all passing on, passing by, transient. But let us not panic; *the word of the Lord abides for ever* (Is 40:8).

### NOTES

1. So Fischer and Kunzelmann. If they are right, and Perler's calculations about Augustine's travels are right, then he may have preached this sermon at Hippo Regius just before setting out for Carthage, or he may have preached it on the way there, perhaps in Hippo Diarrhytus (Bizerta) or in Utica.

2. *Non amittebat filios, sed praemittebat*; wordplay impossible to reproduce in English.

3. See Dan 3.

4. See 2 Mac 7:18, the words of the sixth brother, and 7:32-38, those of the seventh and last. Neither specifically mentions the sins of his fathers, *paterno merito* in Augustine's actual words.

5. See Dan 3:28-31—this in the verse numbering of the Jerusalem Bible. The RSV puts the song of the three young men separately in the Apocrypha, where see verses 5-7.

6. See Jb 7:1.

7. See Rom 9:18.

8. See Mt 5:45.

9. The immediate point of this comparison, so briefly stated, is not very clear. In other places, section 6 below, for example, there is more explicit reference to the straw burnt in the goldsmith's furnace as the analogue of the wicked.

10. This is high anti-Pelagian language; sufficient indication of the comparatively late date.

11. The devil is meant here, not Judas, as the next sentence indicates.

12. The Latin *trado* and its Greek equivalent have a significant range of meaning that English cannot match: to hand over, and hence in some kinds of handing over, to betray; to hand on, and hence *traditio* as tradition, the handing on from master to disciple, from generation to generation, to balance *traditio* as betrayal.

So that Italian saying, *traduttore traditore*, as well as meaning the translator is the betrayer, can also mean, more benignly, the translator is the hander on of the tradition.

13. See Mt 26:15.

14. See Ps 73:11.

15. *Non est honor, sed onus*.

16. As understand about the last things.

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17. See Gn 5:5. Methuselah lived longer, Gn 5:27; but he was not so well known a figure as Adam.

18. Reading *ut illo eamus*, instead of the text's *et illo eamus*, and let us go to him.

## SERMON 301A

ON THE SOLEMNITY OF THE HOLY MACCABEES:  
PREACHED IN BULLA REGIA

Date: 399<sup>1</sup>

*In the gospel the Lord speaks directly to us,  
as well as to his immediate disciples*

1. The gospel and the living word of God, which penetrates the marrow of the soul and searches out the hinges of the heart, is offered to us all for our well-being and salvation, and it cozens none of us, provided we don't cozen ourselves. Here it is, presented to us as a kind of mirror in which we can all take a look at ourselves, and if our inspection reveals any dirt on our faces we can carefully and methodically wipe them clean, so that we don't have to blush the next time we look in the mirror. The crowd, you see, was following the Lord, as we heard in the gospel when it was read,<sup>2</sup> and he turned and spoke to those who were following him. I mean, if he had addressed what he said only to those twelve apostles, each of us could have said, "He was speaking to them, not to us. One thing seems to concern the shepherds, another the flocks." But he spoke to the crowds which were following; so he said it to all of us and to all of you.<sup>3</sup>

Just because we didn't yet exist then, that's no reason why we should suppose it wasn't said to us. After all, we too believe in the one whom they could see; in faith we grasp the one whom they could look at with their eyes. Nor, in any case, was it anything very much to see Christ with the eyes of flesh; if this had been the thing that matters, the people of the Jews would have been the first to find salvation. I mean, they too certainly saw him, and yet they turned him down, and yet, having seen him and turned him down, they went on to kill him. We, though, certainly haven't seen him, and yet we believe, and yet we have welcomed into our hearts the one we have never looked at with our eyes. Which is why he said to one of his own, who was then among the twelve, *Because you have seen, you have believed; blessed are those who do not see, and who believe* (Jn 20:29).

After all, if our Lord and savior Jesus Christ were present here and now in the flesh, and just stood there and kept quiet, what good would it do us? But if it was by speaking that he was of use, he speaks even now, when the gospel is



chanted. Though as a matter of fact his presence too confers many advantages, as God. Where, though, is God not, or when is God ever absent? Don't you be absent from God, and God is with you; especially because he himself promised he would be, and we possess his promise, written down as a kind of charter: *Behold I am with you up to the completion of the age* (Mt 28:20). But he was looking ahead to us, making the promise to us.

*Whoever does not renounce everything he has, cannot be my disciple*

2. So let's go back, and listen to what he said, and as I said, take a look at ourselves, and anything we find defective in ourselves let us work at putting right with all diligence, according to the standard of beauty which pleases his eyes. And because we are not up to the task ourselves, let us call upon him to assist us. May the one who formed us reform us, the one who created us recreate us, the one who installed us restore us to perfection. So this is what he said: *What man is there, who wishes to build a tower, and does not sit down first, and work out if he has the resources to complete it? In case, perhaps, he should begin to build and not finish it, and people passing by would say, Look at the man who began to build, and was not able to complete. Or again, what king is there, who sets off to wage war against another king, and does not first consider whether he is in a position with ten thousand to meet that one who has twenty thousand? Otherwise, while he is still a long way off, he sends ambassadors to sue for peace.* And he concluded these two comparisons like this: *In the same way, whoever does not renounce all that he has, cannot be my disciple* (Lk 14:28-33).

If it were only those people who were called disciples, then it wouldn't be said to us. But because, as scripture bears witness, all Christians are Christ's disciples—*For you have one master, it says, the Christ* (Mt 23:10)—let those alone deny they are Christ's disciples, who deny that they have Christ as their master. You see, just because we address you from this higher place,<sup>4</sup> it doesn't mean that we are your masters. That one, I mean, is the master of us all, whose chair is above all the heavens; under him we all forgather into one school, both you and we are all fellow pupils. But what we are doing is advising and warning you, in the way senior scholars are accustomed to do.

The tower and resources, faith and patience; the tower is faith, the resources are patience. If people lack the patience to put up with the evils of this world, they are short on resources. The bad king with twenty thousand is the devil, the king with ten thousand is the Christian. Single against double, truth against falsehood, because simplicity against duplicity. Be simple of heart; don't be a hypocrite, showing one thing openly, covering up another; and you will defeat the one who in his duplicity *transfigures himself as an angel of light* (2 Cor 11:14). How can you be like that, where are these resources to be found? Where can you get hold of that perfect simplicity, which is absolutely steady, and unshakable in its perseverance? In what follows, which seems to be very hard. This is what I said, that God's word doesn't cozen anyone. *In the same way, he said, whoever does not renounce all that he has, cannot be my disciple.*

Many have done this, and have examined themselves<sup>5</sup> before a time of persecution was looming up, and they renounced everything relating to the world, and followed Christ. Among them were the apostles, who said, *Behold, we have left everything, and have followed you* (Mk 10:28). Not that they left anything very much, because they were all poor; but those who have overcome all kinds of greed are judged to have given up great possessions.

*The good things that make people good are the ones we should look for*

3. The disciples said this to the Lord, in fact, on the occasion when that rich man went away sad, after hearing the advice about eternal life he had asked for from the most reliable and truthful of teachers. Some rich young man, you see, had come himself to the Lord, and said to him, *Good master, what good must I do, in order to obtain eternal life?* (Mk 10:17). I rather think that amid all the luxury and the delicacies provided by his wealth, he was being jabbed with the goad of approaching death, and was already beginning to waste away;<sup>6</sup> and he knew he would not be able to take any of his possessions to the underworld, and amid all his abundant resources for the flesh his soul was sighing in utter want. He was saying to himself, as we must suppose, positively swamped by his affluence and his riches, “It’s all good, all beautiful, all delicious, all lovely; but when that one last moment comes, it’s all to be left behind. Not a single item of it all can be taken away from here. There remains just life and conscience alone; there remains after the body just the life of the soul, and conscience alone. And if this is a bad<sup>7</sup> one, it is not now to be called life, but another, and worse sort of death. There is nothing worse, after all, than that death, where death does not die.”

It was because amid his delightful things his thoughts were running on those lines, that though he had so many good things he came to the Lord. He was saying to himself, you see, “If after so many of these good things I also get to have eternal life, who could be more fortunate than I?” So he asked about what was worrying him, and said, *Good master, what must I do to obtain eternal life?*

The Lord answered him first of all, *Why ask me about the good? Nobody is good, except the one God* (Mt 19:17).<sup>8</sup> That is to say, “It’s only the one God who can make you blessed.” Yes, the things the rich have are good; but those good things don’t make people good; because if those good things had ever made people good, the more affluent anyone was, the better he would be. Since, however, we see that many people are all the worse, the better off they are, there can be no doubt that other good things are to be sought which really do make people good. They are the things, you see, which cannot be owned by bad people: justice, kindness, temperance, religion, charity, the worship of God, finally God himself. That’s the good we ought to be running toward together; that’s the good which, unless we scorn these others, we shall not obtain.

*You give up the whole world, if you leave yourself nothing*

4. Am I to entice and charm you, when the gospel doesn't entice or charm either you or me? So I urge this upon your graces, brothers and sisters, as the apostle says, *The time is short. It remains, he says, that both those who have wives should be as though they did not have, and those who weep as though they were not weeping, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they were not buying, and those who use this world as though they were not using it* (1 Cor 7:29-31). So the apostles at that time left everything they had, and that's why Peter said, *Look, we have left everything* (Mk 10:28).

What have you left, Peter? One little boat, a single net?

He would answer me, "I left the whole world, as I left myself nothing." Everyone's poverty, that is the poverty of all the poor, has very small means, but has very big desires. God doesn't pay attention to what you have, but to what you want; it's the will that's judged, that is invisibly scrutinized by the one who is himself invisible. So they did leave everything, and definitely left the whole world, because they cut themselves off from whatever they were hoping for in this world, and followed him by whom the world was made, trusting to his promises. And later on many people did this.

And is it surprising, my dear brothers and sisters, that he did this?<sup>9</sup> The very people who had slain the Lord did this. There in Jerusalem, when the Lord had ascended into heaven, and after ten days had fulfilled his promise and sent the Holy Spirit, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in the tongues of all nations. Then many Jews who were in Jerusalem heard them and were overawed at the gift of the grace of the Savior. While they were wondering at it, and debating among themselves in their amazement what the cause of it could be, they received the answer from the apostles, that it was the one they had slain who had bestowed it by his Spirit; and so they asked for advice about their salvation. They were desperate, you see, and they never imagined that having slain the Lord of the whole created universe they could be pardoned for such a crime; and they received reassurance from the apostles. Promised forgiveness, promised they would not be punished, they believed; and selling everything they had, they laid the price of their possessions at the feet of the apostles. The greater the terror they had felt, the greater their subsequent goodness; a great dread had weaned them from their pleasures.

Those who had slain the Lord did this; many others did it later on, and many do it still. We know, we observe examples, we are consoled, we are delighted over many cases, to see that the word of God is not without effect in those who hear it faithfully. But others didn't do that, and when persecution came they passed the test, because they were using the world as though they were not using it. Not only common people, not just any old artisans, just the poor, just the needy, just the lower middle classes,<sup>10</sup> but also many of the great, the wealthy, senators, the noblest ladies too; when persecution came they renounced all their possessions, in order to complete the tower, and in the simplicity of their courage and piety to defeat the duplicity and deceit of the devil.

*Other tests of faith besides overt persecution*

5. So the Lord Christ was exhorting all of us to martyrdom when he said, *In the same way, whoever does not renounce everything that he has, cannot be my disciple* (Lk 14:33). So I'm questioning you, Christian soul. If I say to you what was said to the rich man, *Go, you too sell all your possessions, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Christ* (Mk 10:21), will you too, perhaps, go away sorrowful? That, you see, is how that young man went away—sorrowful. And yet the Christian cannot help hearing these words; or have you been able, when the gospel has been read, to shut your ears against your own salvation? You heard, *Whoever does not renounce everything that he has, cannot be my disciple*. Think about yourself; you became a believer, you were baptized, you believed—you haven't given up your possessions. But I'll interrogate your faith; in what sort of way have you believed? Here comes some threat to your faith; you're told, "If you persist in it, I will take away everything you have." I interrogate your heart of hearts; if you say in your heart of hearts, "Let him take what I have; I'm not letting go of the faith," you are both holding on to something and at the same time you have renounced something. Because you are holding on, you are not being held. I mean, it's not a bad thing to hold on, it's a bad thing to be held.<sup>11</sup>

But there's no persecution, and there's no way you can test what you have promised the Lord? Well, the affairs of every day test people effectively enough. What if some time or other Mr. X invites you to give some false evidence, and he's a powerful figure who can be feared in terms of time, and if he has made a threat, can harm you by carrying it out in terms of time;<sup>12</sup> and he's trying to persuade you to give false evidence? He doesn't say to you, "Deny Christ"; that, after all, is what you were preparing yourself for. It's in another way that that double-tongued twister has crept in,<sup>13</sup> which you weren't considering, which you hadn't put before yourself. "Give," he says, "some false evidence; if you don't give it, I will do this and that." He threatens you with banning, he threatens you with death. Test yourself on that score, look to yourself in that situation. Are you giving the false evidence? You have let go of Christ, because he said, *I am the truth* (Jn 14:6). You have given false evidence, you have acted against the truth; therefore you have let go of Christ. And what was that man going to do to you by threatening you with banning? Reduce you to penury? What would you lack, since God would be with you?

But he was threatening something more.

What's that something more? He was threatening he would kill you. Your flesh. Your soul too? You pay attention to what he's threatening you with; aren't you paying any attention to what you yourself may be doing? He's threatening to kill the flesh; *but the mouth that lies kills the soul* (Wis 1:11). There are two of you, your enemy and you; yet he's a man, and so are you; both perishable as regards the flesh, both immortal as regards the soul, both going to pass on in due course, and on this earth wanderers and passing guests. He's threatening you with death, not knowing whether he will die before he can carry out his threat. But anyway, suppose he can carry out his threat; I'll pit you against each

other; let's see which is your worse enemy, whether it's he or you. He produces a sword to kill your flesh with; you produce a false tongue to slaughter your soul with. Which of you has struck the more serious blow? Which has done the worse killing? Which has penetrated deeper? He has pierced as far as the bones, as far as the entrails; you, as far as the heart. You have left yourself with nothing whole, once you have destroyed your heart. *The mouth that lies kills*, he said, not the flesh, but *the soul*.

*What God has prepared for those that love him  
is not his promises, but himself*

6. Such are the daily trials and temptations of men. When it comes to iniquity, that you should either commit iniquity or suffer what God wishes you to suffer for a time, that's when you must now pay close attention to the duplicity of that enemy, close attention now to the expenses of that tower. But you quail as you think about it; call upon the one who commanded it. May he help the keeping of his commands in you, and he will award you all he has promised. What, after all, does God promise us? My brothers and sisters, what can I say to make us desire it? What can I say? Is it gold, is it silver, is it estates, is it honors? Is it anything we know on earth? All that's worthless. *What eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it come up into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love him* (1 Cor 2:9). I'll put it in a word; it's not his promises, but himself.

He is greater than anything, the one who made everything; he is more beautiful than anything, the one who shaped everything; he is more powerful than anything, the one who gave energy to everything. So whatever we love on earth, compared with God it's nothing. That's not saying much, whatever we love is nothing; even we ourselves are nothing. The lovers themselves, compared with the thing to be loved, must be cheap in their own eyes. That's the charity enjoined upon us: *with your whole heart, and your whole soul, and your whole mind*. But to this he joined another, and said, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. *On these two commandments depends the whole law, and the prophets* (Lk 10:27; Mt 22:40); so that when you love the Lord, you may know that you are then loving yourself, if you love the Lord. So when you learn how to love yourself by loving the Lord, whisk your neighbor off to God, so that you may enjoy the good together, and such a great good, which is God himself.

*The spectacle of the Maccabee martyrs compared with  
the spectacles the citizens of Bulla Regia frequented*

7. We have just now been spectators of the great contest of the seven brothers and their mother. What a contest, my brothers and sisters, if only our minds knew how to watch it! Compare with this holy spectacle the pleasures and delights of the theaters. There the eyes are defiled,<sup>14</sup> here the heart is purified; here spectators are to be praised, if they become imitators; while there the

spectator is base, and the imitator infamous. Well anyway, I love the martyrs, I go and watch the martyrs; when the Passions of the martyrs are read, I am a spectator, watching them. Say to me, “You should be like that,” and you’ve paid me a compliment. As for you, go and watch the actor, watch the ballet dancer;<sup>15</sup> I will say to you, “You should be like that,” and please don’t be angry. But if I say to you, “You should be like that,” and you are angry, then it’s not my words but your anger that makes you guilty. By getting angry you are passing judgment on yourself. There you are, what you love is what you dread being like.

The spectacle of the holy Maccabees, the memory of whose victory we are celebrating today, seemed to me to provide just the right opportunity for admonishing your graces about theatrical shows and spectacles. O my brothers and sisters of Bulla, all round about, in practically all your neighboring towns, this kind of licentious civic piety<sup>16</sup> has fallen silent. Are you not ashamed that among you alone obscenity has remained up for sale? Or do you enjoy, amid the corn, the wine, the oil, the animals, the beasts and anything else up for sale on market days,<sup>17</sup> buying and selling obscenity? And perhaps tourists come here for such wares, and they are asked, “What are you looking for? Actors, prostitutes? You can get them at Bulla.” Do you think that’s something to be proud of? I don’t know if anything could be more shameful. With the deepest sorrow I say it, my brothers and sisters, but the neighborhood of other towns condemns you in the sight of men and the judgment of God. Anyone who wishes to copy something bad puts you up as a model. To my own Hippo, where such things have by now almost entirely fallen away, these obscene characters are brought along from your city.

But perhaps you will say, “We are like Carthage.” Just as there is a holy and religious community in Carthage, so also there is such a vast population in a great metropolis, that they all use others to excuse themselves by. In Carthage, you can say, “The pagans do it, the Jews do it”; here, whoever is doing it, Christians are doing it. It’s with great sorrow that I’m saying this to you; if only some time or other the wound in my heart may be healed by your correcting yourselves! I’m telling your graces; in the name of God I know both your city and those which are near you, how big the population is here, how big the congregation; you cannot help being all of you known to the one who has been placed here to minister word and sacrament to you.<sup>18</sup> Who can excuse you for this shameful behavior?

Look here, the games are on; let the Christians not go, and then let’s see if there isn’t such a vast emptiness that the very shamelessness is ashamed of itself. Let’s see whether the shameless characters themselves aren’t converted to the Lord, and so delivered, or else if they remain in their shameless profession, whether they don’t move on from this city. Do yourselves this favor, Christians; don’t enter the theaters.

*The false distinction between clergy and laity*

8. But I see your numbers are very few. Along comes the day of Christ’s passion, along comes Easter, and this space won’t be able to contain your

crowds. So will you, who have just now been filling the theaters, be the people filling this place? At least compare the places, and beat your breasts. Perhaps you're saying, "It's all very well for you to abstain from these things, you clergy, you bishops, but not for us lay people." So does that really strike you as a fair thing to say? After all, what are we, if you perish? What we are for our own sakes is one thing, what we are for yours another; we are Christians for our own sakes, clergy and bishops only for yours.

The apostle wasn't talking to the clergy, not to bishops and priests when he said, *But you are the members of Christ*. He was saying to the people, saying to the faithful, saying to Christians, *But you are the members of Christ*. Consider what body you are the members of, consider under what head you are living in the compact unity of the body; observe the one Spirit which you have received from him. I throw back at you the very words of the apostle: *So taking the members of Christ, shall I make them the members of a harlot?* (1 Cor 6:15). And do our Christians not only love harlots, but also set them up in business? They not only love the ones who were already there, but they also set up others in business who weren't there; as though these women too didn't have souls, as though the blood of Christ weren't shed for them too, as though he had never said, *The harlots and the tax-gatherers shall go ahead of you into the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 21:31).

So while we should be trying to win them, there is a general preference for perishing with them. And this is done by Christians; I'd rather not say, and by the faithful. A catechumen, perhaps, has a low opinion of his worth. "I'm just a catechumen," he says.

You're a catechumen?

"Yes, a catechumen."

Do you have one forehead on which you received the sign of Christ, and another which you carry along to the theater? Do you want to go? Change your forehead, and get along there. So, as you can't change your forehead, don't ruin it. The name of God is invoked over you, Christ is invoked over you, God is invoked over you, the sign of Christ's cross is sketched and fixed for you on your forehead. I'm exhorting you all, addressing you all; you will see how much more honorable you will be in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

*An exhortation to imitate the neighboring town of Simittu*

9. I make so bold as to say, imitate your neighboring city, imitate the neighboring city of Simittu.<sup>20</sup> I won't say any more to you than that. I'll say it more plainly, though, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ: nobody there ever enters the theater, no shameless person has remained there. The governor's representative<sup>21</sup> wanted to stage obscenities of this sort, no leading citizen, none of the common folk, not a single Jew went along. Are they not decent people? Is that not a city? Is that place not a colony, and all the more decent, the emptier it is of these things?

I wouldn't be saying all this to you, if I had heard any good about you; but

if I keep silent, I am in dread of being judged together with you. So it was God's will, my brothers and sisters, that I should pass this way. My brother<sup>22</sup> detained me, ordered me, begged me, forced me to preach to you. What should I preach about, if not what I am most afraid of? What should I preach about, if not what gives me most pain?<sup>23</sup> Don't you realize that I and all of us are going to have to render a very serious account to God for your applause? Do you suppose this applause does us any honor? It's a burden to us, not a guerdon.<sup>24</sup> A very serious account is to be given for this applause; I really am afraid that Christ will say at his judgment, "Bad servants, you gladly accepted the applause of my people, and you kept quiet to them about their death." However, the Lord our God will grant that for the rest we may hear good things about you, and in his mercy may be consoled by the news of your correcting yourselves. Yes, the joy will be all the greater, after all, for the great sadness we feel now.

### NOTES

1. So Perler, *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin*, page 227. The sermon was preached at Bulla Regia, a town some 130 miles west of Carthage, on Augustine's journey back to Hippo Regius, after he had spent the first half of the summer in the metropolis. The Maccabees scarcely figure in it at all; they are brought in at section 7, to introduce his swingeing attack on the habits of the local citizens.

2. The passage was presumably Lk 14:25-35. See section 2.

3. All of us clergy, and of you laity.

4. He would be speaking from the *ambo*, or pulpit, because the local bishop would be occupying the *cathedra* or bishop's throne. But he is making a general remark about bishops and clergy, and their higher position, symbolized by the *cathedra*, the chair of authority, the chair of the master in the academic, as much as the ecclesiastical, sense.

5. In the mirror he was talking about earlier. The editor of the text in Migne's supplement to the Maurists (PL 46, 876), suggests that *examinaverunt*, which is the manuscript reading, and which I have translated, is a copyist's mistake for *exinaniverunt*, have emptied themselves. I think his emendation is uncalled for.

6. I myself rather think that Augustine is suggesting the young man was mortally ill, not simply that he was obsessed with the thought of inevitable death. He says that he was wasting away, *contabescerebat*; a word one would certainly use, for instance, of someone suffering from advanced tuberculosis. Whether Jesus would have said to such a very sick man, "Come, follow me"—which of course meant tramping round Judea—is another matter.

7. There is a short gap in the text here. *Quae si erit . . . non jam vita*. One supplies the word *mala*, a bad one.

8. Augustine is just relating the story, without bothering which gospel he is taking it from; bits and pieces from each of them, or perhaps from a Latin translation of Tatian's *Diatessaron*, his harmony of the gospels.

9. Reading *quia hoc fecit*—the reference is to Peter, presumably—instead of the text's *qui hoc fecit*, which is hardly a sentence: Is it surprising, who did this.

10. *Mediocres*. The whole list is a kind of hymn to snobbery—sung, I hope, with his tongue in his cheek, if that is physically possible.

11. Not bad to hold onto faith, bad to be held by love of possessions; a not very helpful playing around with words.



12. As distinct from eternity.

13. The devil.

14. Because theatrical performances were invariably obscene, or at least presumed to be so by the ecclesiastical authorities.

15. *Mimus* and *pantomimus*; there are no English equivalents that can convey the disdain these words evoked in respectable, "decent" circles.

16. Reading *lasciva pietas*, which is a slight emendation of the *lascivia pietas* of the Migne text, PL 46, 879, instead of *lascivia impietatis*, the licentiousness of impiety, which is the more recent editor's emendation of a manuscript's *lasciviam pietatis*. I am sure Augustine used the word *pietas*, with vast irony, of course; but also because the excuse for putting on such shows was precisely civic piety, a misplaced sense of local loyalty.

17. The text has *in Romanis vel nundinis*. I omit *Romanis vel*, because I cannot conceive what it means. The Migne editor suggests supplying *foris* after *Romanis*; but what have Roman forums got to do with a little town like Bulla Regia? I think *Romanis* must be a copyist's mistake for something else, but I cannot guess what.

18. The local bishop, whom in section 9 below Augustine calls his brother, and who had pressed him to stay and preach on the subject.

19. If you don't go to the games and the theaters, I presume.

20. A town about six miles from Bulla Regia.

21. *Legatus*.

22. The local bishop.

23. Here, presumably, loud applause, *laudes*.

24. *Onerant, non honorant*.

## SERMON 302

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF SAINT LAWRENCE

Date: 400<sup>1</sup>

*Why God sometimes grants temporal benefits  
through the prayers of the martyrs*

1. Today is the feast of the blessed martyr Lawrence.<sup>2</sup> Readings suitable to this holy solemnity were heard. We have heard them and sung them,<sup>3</sup> and followed the reading of the gospel with the greatest attention. So let us follow in the footsteps of the martyrs by imitating them, or else we will be celebrating their festivities to no purpose. Is there anyone who doesn't know about the powerful merits of this particular martyr? Did anybody ever pray there, and not obtain the favor asked for? To how many of the weaker brethren have his merits granted even the temporal benefits which he himself scorned! They were conceded, you see, not so that those who prayed for them might remain in their weakness, but so that by being granted inferior<sup>4</sup> benefits, their love might be stimulated to seek the better ones.

A father, after all, often concedes trivial playthings to his small children, which they cry loudly about if they don't get them. A kindly and fatherly indulgence shares things, allows things, which he wouldn't like his children to remain attached to as they grow bigger, as they grow up. So he gives nuts<sup>5</sup> to little boys for whom he is keeping an inheritance. Fatherly loving-kindness gives in to children at play and enjoying themselves with toys, in order not to demand too much from that tender age. This is to coax and wheedle and fondle, not to train and build up character. What the martyrs built up, what they were able to grasp, what with their great hearts they did grasp, what they shed their blood for, you heard in the gospel: *Your reward is great in heaven* (Mt 5:12).

*Let us love eternal life in the same way as temporal life  
is cherished by its lovers*

2. However, my dearest friends, since there are two lives, one before death, the other after death, both sorts have had and have their lovers. What this short life is like, well is there any need to describe it? We all experience how

distressing, how full of complaints it is; beset by trials and temptations, full of fears, feverish with all kinds of greed, subject to accidents; grieving when things go badly, smugly self-satisfied when they go well; cock-a-hoop over profits, in agony over losses. And even when cock-a-hoop over profits, it's in dread of losing what it has gained; the man dreading being investigated on their account, who before he had anything was never subjected to investigation. True unhappiness, false happiness. The person at the bottom of the heap longs to climb to the top, the person at the top dreads sliding down to the bottom. The have-nots envy the haves; the haves despise the have-nots. And who can find the words to unfold how extensively and conspicuously ugly this life is?

And yet this ugliness has its lovers; and how we long to find just a very, very few who love eternal life, which they cannot reach the end of, in the same way as lovers like that cherish this life, which we not only soon get to the end of, but which if it is at all protracted, we are terrified every day may come to an end any minute. What can I do? What action am I to take? What am I to say? What sharp, well-aimed threats, what burning exhortations can I apply to hard and sluggish hearts, frozen in the ice of earthly numbness and dullness, to make them at last shake off the lethargy of the world, and catch fire at the prospect of eternity? What, I repeat, am I to do? What am I to say?

Well, there is something to hand, and it has just occurred to me that the affairs of every day have some advice for me, and suggest to me what I should say. From love of this temporal life advance, if you can manage it, to loving the eternal life which the martyrs loved, while they thought nothing of these temporal things. I beg, I beseech, I implore not only you, but together with you also myself and us clergy: let us cherish eternal life. I don't want us to love it more, though it is much more; let us just cherish it in the same way as temporal life is cherished by its lovers, not as temporal life was cherished by the martyrs. They, you see, cherished it either not at all or very little, and they found it easy to put eternal life before it. So I didn't have the martyrs in mind, when I said, "Let us cherish eternal life as temporal life is cherished"; I meant, as temporal life is cherished by its lovers, so let us cherish eternal life, love of which is what Christians profess.

*It was not for the sake of this temporal life that we became Christians*

3. That, after all, is why we became Christians; it wasn't for the sake of this temporal life. How many Christians, I mean to say, are snatched away before they have grown up, while sacrilegious people continue in this life until decrepit old age! But again, among them too there are many who die before they're grown up. Christians have many losses, the ungodly many gains; and again, the ungodly have many losses, Christians many gains. And the ungodly are frequently honored, while Christians are tossed aside; and again, Christians are frequently honored, while the ungodly are tossed aside. Since, then, these good and bad things are common to both sorts, can it be, brothers and sisters, that when we became Christians, we gave our name to Christ and submitted our

foreheads to such a tremendous sign, simply in order to avoid these evils and obtain these good things?

You're a Christian, you carry on your forehead the cross of Christ. The mark stamped on you<sup>6</sup> teaches you what you should profess. When he was hanging on the cross—the cross you carry on your forehead; don't delight in the sign of the wood, but in the sign of the one hanging on it—so when he was hanging on the cross, he was looking round at the people raving against him, putting up with their insults, praying for his enemies. Even while he was being killed, the doctor was curing the sick with his blood. He said, you see, *Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34). Nor were these words futile or without effect. And of those people, thousands later on believed in the one they had slain, so that they learned how to suffer for him who had suffered both for them and at their hands.

So here, brothers and sisters, is to be understood from this sign, from this stamp which Christians receive even when they become catechumens, here is to be understood why we are Christians; that it is not for the sake of temporal and passing things, whether good or bad; but for the sake of avoiding bad things that will not pass, and of acquiring good things that will have no limit and no end.

*The things people do out of love for temporal life*

4. However, as I had started to say, brothers and sisters, what I was reminding you of and proposing to you, please, please let us pay attention to the way this temporal life is cherished by its lovers. How filled with dread of dying people are, though bound to die anyway! You can see people tremble, take to their heels, look for hiding places, snatch at last-ditch defenses, beg, prostrate themselves; if it were possible, give whatever they have to be granted their lives, to live one day more, to extend just a little longer a life that is always uncertain.

So many things people do; who ever does anything like that for the sake of eternal life? Let me address the lover of this present life. What are you doing, why are you in such a hurry, why so full of dread, why taking to your heels, why looking for a hiding place?

In order to stay alive, he says.

Really to stay alive? To stay alive in such a way as to be alive always?

No.

Then you aren't going to all this trouble to destroy death, but only to delay it. If you go to such lengths just to die a little later, why not do something in order never to die at all?

*You are prepared to be reduced to beggary in order to live a little longer, but not to give away your superfluities in order to reign for ever with Christ*

5. How many people we find who will say, "Let the treasury take all my property, just so I may die a little later"! How rarely we find anybody who will

say, "Let Christ take all my property, so that I may never die"! And yet, O lover of this temporal life, if the treasury takes it, it strips you of it in this world; if Christ takes it, he keeps it for you in heaven. For the sake of this life people want to have something to live on, and for the sake of this life they are ready to give up what they live on. What you are saving up in order to live on, you give away in order to live, only to collapse, maybe, from hunger. And yet you say, "Let them take it, what do I care? I'm prepared to beg." You give up what you live on, you're ready to beg in order to live. You're ready, after giving up even your necessities, to beg in this world; and you're not ready, after handing out your superfluities, to reign with Christ?

Please, I implore you, weigh them up carefully. If there are any just scales to be found in the drawers of your heart, bring them out, and place these two things on them, and balance them against each other: begging in this world, and reigning with Christ. There's simply nothing to balance; this thing, in comparison with that, has no weight at all. Even if I said reigning in this world, and reigning with Christ, there would be nothing to balance. I'm sorry I said weigh them up; there is absolutely nothing to weigh up. *What does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, but suffers the loss of his own soul?* (Mk 8:36). Now it's the one who hasn't suffered the loss of his own soul that reigns with Christ. Who, though, can reign in this world securely? Suppose he does reign securely; does he reign eternally?

*The folly of loving this life*

6. Turn your attention to what I was proposing, the kind of lovers this present life has, this temporal life, short life, ugly life, what sort of lovers it has. Often enough for the sake of this life a man is reduced to rags, to being a beggar. You ask him why. He answers like this: "To keep alive." What have you fallen in love with, and what are you in love with? Where has it got you? What are you going to say, bad lover, wrong-headed lover? What are you going to say to this sweetheart of yours? Say it, talk to her, coax and court her, if you can. What are you going to say?

It is to these rags that your beauty has brought me.

She shouts at you, "I'm ugly, and you're in love with me?" She shouts, "I'm hard as nails, and you embrace me?" She shouts, "I'm flighty, and you strain yourself to follow me?" Here's how your sweetheart answers you: "I won't stay with you; even if I'm with you for a while, I won't remain with you. I have been able to reduce you to rags, I haven't been able to make you happy."

*Eternal life is God himself; this life a mist that vanishes*

7. So since we are Christians, let us implore the Lord our God to help us against the blandishments of this wrongly loved life, and let us love the beauty of that life, which *eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it come up into the heart of man*. This, you see, is the life which God has prepared for those

who love him (1 Cor 2:9); and God himself is this very life. You cried out, you all sighed and groaned. Let us love this life with all our might. May God grant that we love it. Let us pour out our tears to him, not only to gain, but also to cherish this life.

How am I going to advise you, what am I going to demonstrate to you? Do I have to read books to you, to show you how uncertain this life is, how fleeting, how practically non-existent, how true it is, where it is written, *For what is your life? A mist appearing for a little while, and thereafter it will be dispersed* (Jas 4:14)? He was alive yesterday, he isn't today; he was to be seen a little while ago, now there isn't anyone there to see. A person is brought out to the grave; the mourners return home sad, they soon forget. People say, "Really, man is nothing at all," and a man says this himself, and a man doesn't correct himself, so that man may be, not nothing, but something.

So the martyrs were lovers of that other life, and the martyrs are the possessors of that other life. They have what they loved; they will have it more richly in the resurrection of the dead. So this is the road they paved for us with their terrible sufferings.

*Saint Lawrence said of the poor,  
"These are the treasures of the Church"*

8. Saint Lawrence was an archdeacon. The treasures of the Church were demanded of him by the persecutor, as the tradition states. Which is why he suffered such dreadful torments, it is quite horrifying to hear about them. Placed on a gridiron, he was scorched all over his body, tortured with the most excruciating pain by fire. Yet he overcame all these bodily afflictions with the sturdy strength of his charity, helped by the one who had made him like that. *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus in good works, which God has prepared for us to walk in* (Eph 2:10).

Now this is what he did, to stoke up the fires of the persecutor's rage, not because he wanted him to be angry, but out of a desire to commend his own faith to posterity, and to show how he was dying without a care in the world: "Let some carts come with me," he said, "in which I can bring along the Church's treasures." Carts were sent, he loaded them with the poor, and ordered them to go back, saying, "These are the treasures of the Church." And it's true, brothers and sisters; the needs of the needy are the great wealth and treasure of Christians, if we really understand where we should be saving what we possess. The needy are there in front of us; if we deposit our savings with them, we won't lose them. We aren't afraid of anybody making off with them; the one who gave them to us, you see, is keeping them safe; nor could we find a better guardian, nor a more trustworthy maker and keeper of promises.

*Let us always be on our toes to imitate the martyrs*

9. So as we reflect on all this, let us be on our toes to imitate the martyrs, if we want the feast days we celebrate to be of any use to us. I have always

admonished you about this, brothers and sisters, I have never stopped doing so, never kept quiet about it. Eternal life is to be cherished, this present life to be made light of. We must live good lives, must hope for the true good. People who are bad must change their ways; when they've changed, they must be instructed; when they've been instructed, they should persevere. *The one who perseveres to the end, you see, that is the one who will be saved* (Mt 24:13).<sup>7</sup>

*It is not lawful to rage against bad people*

10. But many bad people say many bad things.<sup>8</sup> And what would you have, yourself? Good things from bad people? Don't look for grapes on thorn bushes; you've been forbidden to do so; *it is from the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks* (Lk 6:44-45). If you can manage anything, if you are no longer bad yourself, make an option for the bad person to become good. Why vent your rage on the bad?

"Because they're bad," you say.

By venting your rage on them, you are adding yourself to their number. I'll give you some advice; does the bad person displease you? Don't let there be two of them. You're objecting to him, and you're adding yourself on to him; you're increasing the number of the one you're condemning. Do you want to overcome the bad with the bad? To overcome evil with evil? There will be two evils, both needing to be overcome.

Can't you hear the advice of your Lord through the apostle: *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (Rom 12:21)? Perhaps he's worse, though you too are bad; still, that makes two bad ones. I would like at least one of them to be good. Finally you vent your rage on him to the point of death. And what about after death, where none of your punishment now reaches that bad man, and only the malice of another bad man is finding expression? That's mindless madness, not avenging justice.<sup>9</sup>

*It's not enough not to have taken part in mob violence; there is also the duty of forbidding subordinates to take part in it*

11. What am I to say to you, my brothers and sisters, what am I to say to you? Don't give such people your approval. But am I really to think this of you, that you do approve of such people? Far be it from me to think that of you. But it isn't enough for you to disapprove of such people, not nearly enough; there is something more required of you. None of you should say, "God knows I didn't do it, God knows I didn't do it, and God also knows I didn't want it to happen." There you have two things you said: both "I didn't do it," and "I didn't want it to happen." It's still not enough.

No, it's certainly not enough, if you didn't want it to happen, if you didn't also forbid it. Bad men have judges to deal with them, they have the authorities to deal with them, about whom the apostle says, *For he does not carry the sword without reason. For he is the avenger in wrath, but against the one who does*

*evil. The avenger in wrath against the one who does evil. But if you do evil, he says, be afraid. For he does not carry the sword without reason. But do you wish not to be afraid of the authorities? Do good, and you will have praise from them (Rom 13:4.3).*

*How Saint Lawrence and other martyrs  
"have praise from the authorities"*

12. "So what evil," someone says, "had Saint Lawrence done, that he should be put to death by the authorities? How was this fulfilled in his case, *Do good, and you will have praise from them (Rom 13:3)*, seeing that precisely by doing good, he earned such terrible torments from them?"

If the holy martyr Lawrence didn't have praise from them, he wouldn't be honored today, he wouldn't be acclaimed by us, he wouldn't have his praises sung far and wide. So he does have praise from them, even though they don't want him to.

The apostle, after all, didn't say, "Do good, and the very authorities will praise you." I mean, all the apostles and martyrs did good, and the authorities didn't praise them, but in fact put them to death. So if he had said, "Do good, and they will praise you," he would have been deceiving you. But as it is, he tempered his words, he took a look round, he weighed them, measured them, circumsised them. Analyze what you heard: *Do good, and you will have praise from them.* You see, if the authorities are just, you will have praise from them, with them in fact praising you yourselves. If, though, they are iniquitous, when you have died for the faith, for justice, for the truth, you will have praise from them, even while they are raging against you. It's from them, you see, you will have it, not because they are praising you, but because they are providing you with the occasion to be praised. So then, do good, and you will have it, and you will be sure of it.

*Coming back to the case of the man who was lynched; not everybody  
has the right to put evildoers to death*

13. "But that bad man did so many things, oppressed so many people, reduced so many to beggary and penury."

There are judges to deal with him, there are the authorities to deal with him.<sup>10</sup> The state is well ordered; *for the authorities that exist have been ordained by God (Rom 13:1)*. What business is it of yours to vent your rage like that? What authority have you received—except that this isn't a case of public punishment, but of open brigandage? I mean, what's the position? Consider a man destined for the scaffold, and condemned, the sword already hanging over him; it is not permissible for him to be struck down by anyone among the various ranks of the authorities, but only by the one who is employed for this; the executioner is employed for this; it's by him that the condemned man is to be struck down. If the shorthand writer strikes the condemned man, already destined for the scaffold, isn't he both killing a condemned man, and also condemning himself as a



murderer? Certainly the one he kills had already been condemned, already destined for the scaffold; but to strike him down in an unauthorized manner is murder.

So if it's murder to strike a condemned man in an unauthorized manner, what is it, I ask you, to wish to strike one who hasn't been tried, to wish to strike one who hasn't been judged, to want to strike a bad man without receiving any authority to do so? You see, I'm not defending bad men, or saying bad men aren't bad. Those who pass judgment on them will have to account for that. Why do you want to render a very difficult account for someone else's death, when you don't bear the burden of authority? God has saved you from being a judge; why grab someone else's responsibility? Give an account just of yourself.

*The lesson driven home by the case of those who brought the woman taken in adultery to Jesus*

14. O Lord, how truly you pricked the consciences of men venting their rage, when you said, *Let the one who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her* (Jn 8:7)! Cut to the quick by a sharp and weighty word, they examined their consciences, and blushed at the presence of justice in person; and departing one by one, they left the unhappy woman there alone. But the guilty woman wasn't alone, because the judge was with her, not yet passing judgment, but extending mercy. When those who were thirsting for blood withdrew, they left behind them a miserable woman and mercy. And the Lord said to her, *Has nobody condemned you? She answered, Nobody, Lord. Neither will I condemn you, he said. Go, from now on sin no more* (Jn 8:10-11).

*Thoughts about the man who was lynched being a soldier*

15. "But that soldier did such dreadful things to me."<sup>11</sup> I would like to know, if you were a soldier, whether you wouldn't be doing the same sort of things yourself. Neither do I want such things to be done by soldiers that the poor are afflicted, I don't want it; I want them also to listen to the gospel. I mean it isn't being a soldier that prevents you doing good, but being evil-minded.<sup>12</sup> After all, when soldiers came to be baptized by John, they said, *And what shall we do? John said to them, Do not ever rough anyone up, or bring false charges against anyone; let your pay be enough for you* (Lk 3:14).

And really, brothers and sisters, if soldiers and policemen really were like that, how fortunate a society we would have; but if it wasn't only the soldiers who were like that, but also if the customs men were like what is described there. Because the publicans too, that is the customs men, said, *And we, what shall we do? The reply was, Exact nothing more than what is laid down for you* (Lk 3:13). The soldier was put on the right lines, the customs man was put on the right lines; let the private citizen<sup>13</sup> too be put on the right lines. You have some straightforward guidance for all kinds. *What shall we all do? Let the one who has two shirts share with the one who has none; and the one who has food, let*

*him do likewise* (Lk 3:10-11). We want the soldiers to listen to what Christ<sup>14</sup> commanded; let us also listen ourselves. I mean, he isn't Christ for them and not for us; or their God and not ours. Let us all listen, and live harmoniously in peace.

*It's only bad people who vent their rage on bad people*

16. "He oppressed me, when I was engaged in business."

What about you? Did you conduct your business honestly? Did you never cheat anyone in that business of yours, never swear a false oath in the course of that business? Did you never say, "By the one who carried me safely across the sea, I bought for so much" something you didn't buy for so much?

Brothers and sisters, I'll say it to you more bluntly, and as far as the Lord grants me, freely: It's only bad people who vent their rage on bad people. The obligations of authority are another matter. Because the judge is frequently compelled to unsheathe the sword, and he would prefer not to strike. As far as he is concerned, you see, he was willing to pass a sentence short of bloodshed; but perhaps he didn't want law and order to be undermined. It was the concern of his profession, of his authority, of his duty. What is your concern, but to beg God, *Deliver us from evil* (Mt 6:13)? O you who have said, *Deliver us from evil*, may God deliver you from yourself!

*The duty of the bishop to intervene with the authorities*

17. In a word, brothers and sisters, why are we carrying on so long? We are all Christians; I up here also bear the burden of a greater danger. It's often said about me, "Why does he go to that authority?" and "What's the bishop looking for with that authority?" And yet you all know that it's your needs which compel me to go where I would much rather not; to dance attendance, to stand outside the door, to wait while the worthy and the unworthy go in, to be announced, to be scarcely admitted sometimes, to put up with little humiliations, to beg, sometimes to obtain a favor, sometimes to depart in sadness. Who would want to endure such things, unless I was forced to?<sup>15</sup> Let me be, let me not have to endure all that, don't let anybody force me to. Look, as a little concession to me, give me a holiday from this business. I beg you, I beseech you, don't let anybody force me to it; I don't want to have to deal with the authorities. He knows,<sup>16</sup> I'm forced to do so.

And I behave with the authorities as I ought to behave with Christians, if I find Christians in that authority; and with pagans as I ought to behave with pagans; wishing them all well.

"But he should admonish the authorities," he says "to do good."

Am I to admonish them in your presence? Do you know if I've admonished them? You don't know whether I've done it, or whether I haven't. What I know is that you don't know, and that you are judging rashly.

All the same, my brothers and sisters, excuse me, but you can say to me about the authorities, "He could admonish him, and he would do good."

And I will answer, "I did admonish him, but he didn't listen to me." And I admonished him where you weren't there to hear. Who could ever take the people aside to admonish them? At least we have been able to admonish one man on the side, and say, "Act like this, or act like that," where no one else was present. Who could ever take the people aside, and admonish the people with nobody else knowing?<sup>17</sup>

*A bad man dead has to be mourned twice over*

18. It is this emergency that compels me to speak to you like this, or I will have a bad account to render for you to God; or else he will say to me, "You should warn, you should hand out, I would exact repayment."<sup>18</sup> So then distance yourselves, so distance yourselves totally from these bloody deeds. Your only concern, when you see or hear about such things, should be to feel pity.

"But it was a bad man that died!"

He's to be mourned twice over, because he died twice over; both in time, and for eternity. I mean, if a good man had died, we would grieve out of human feelings, because he had left us, because we wanted him to go on living with us. Bad people are to be mourned much more, because after this life they are caught in the clutches of eternal pains. So let it be your business, my brothers and sisters, to grieve, let it be your concern to grieve, not to vent your rage.

*It is up to householders and heads of families to forbid their dependents to take part in riotous behavior*

19. But it's not enough, as I have already said,<sup>19</sup> it's not enough for you not to do these things, for you to lament them, unless you do all in your power to prevent actions that do not fall within the rights and authority of the people. I am not saying, brothers and sisters, that any of you can go out and just tell the populace to stop; that's something not even I can do. But each one of you in his own house can prevent his son, his slave, his friend, his neighbor, his apprentice,<sup>20</sup> his ward from taking part. Work on them so that they don't do these things. Persuade those you can; and be firm and severe with others, over whom you have authority.

One thing I do know, and everyone else knows it together with me, that you will find many households in this city in which there is not a single pagan; while there is no household to be found in which there are no Christians. And if you were to examine the matter carefully, there is no household to be found in which there aren't more Christians than pagans. It's true, you all agree. So you can see that these bad events wouldn't have occurred, if Christians hadn't wanted them to. You haven't got an answer to that. Bad things can be done secretly, but they cannot be done publicly if Christians forbid them and refuse to take part; because each one of you would restrain his slave, each one restrain his son; youth would be cowed by the severity of a father, the severity of an uncle, the severity of a teacher, the severity of a good neighbor, the severity of greater corporal pun-

ishment. If this sort of thing had been done, we wouldn't have been so saddened by these evil occurrences.

*The wrath of God to be feared; the example of Sodom and Gomorrah*

20. My dear brothers and sisters, I'm afraid of the wrath of God; God isn't afraid of mobs. How readily it's said, "What the people has done, it has done; who is there who can punish the people?" Really so, who is there? Not even God? Was God afraid of the whole world, when he brought about the flood? Was he afraid of those cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, when he destroyed them with fire from heaven? I don't wish now to speak of contemporary disasters, how many there have been, and where they have occurred, and I don't want to remind you of their consequences, in case I should appear to be gloating.<sup>21</sup> Did God in his wrath distinguish between those who did the bad deeds, and those who didn't? What he did, in fact, was to lump together those who did them and those who didn't prevent them.

*Have nothing to do with those who take the law into their own hands*

21. So let us at last wind up this sermon. My brothers and sisters, I urge you, I beseech you by the Lord and his gentleness, be gentle in your lives, be peaceful in your lives. Peacefully permit the authorities to do what pertains to them, of which they will have to render an account to God and to their superiors. As often as you have to petition them, make your petitions in an honorable and quiet manner. Don't mix with those who do evil and rampage in a rough and disorderly manner; don't desire to be present at such goings on even as spectators. But as far as you can, let each of you in his own house and his own neighborhood deal with the one with whom you have ties of kinship and charity, by warning, persuading, teaching, correcting; also by restraining him from such seriously evil activities by any kind of threats, so that God may eventually have mercy, and put an end to human evils, and *may not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities, but as far as the east is from the west may cast our sins far away from us* (Ps 103:10.12); and that he *may be gracious to our sins, lest the nations perchance should say, Where is their God?* (Ps 79:9-10).

After the sermon:

*On the right of sanctuary*

22. My brothers and sisters, on account of those who take refuge under the protection of mother Church, on account of its being the common refuge of all sorts, don't be careless and negligent about frequenting your mother, and not departing from the Church; she is anxious, you see, in case the undisciplined crowd should attempt something.<sup>22</sup> For the rest, as far as those authorities are

concerned, there are also laws enacted in the name of God by Christian emperors, which sufficiently and abundantly protect the Church; and the authorities seem to be the sort of men who wouldn't dream of acting against their mother, for which they would both be blamed by men and be liable to God's judgment. Far be it from them to do such a thing; we neither believe it of them, nor see any evidence of it.

But to ensure that the undisciplined crowd does not attempt anything, you should frequent your mother in considerable numbers, because, as I said, this is the refuge not merely of one or two people, but a general one. Even a person who has no cause to take refuge here, may be afraid he does have. I'm telling your graces: Even the crooks take refuge in the Church from those who live upright lives, and those who live upright lives take refuge from the crooks; and sometimes the very crooks take refuge from crooks. There are three sorts of people who take refuge here. The good don't take refuge from the good, only the just don't flee from the just. But either the unjust flee from the just, or the just flee from the unjust, or the unjust from the unjust.

But if we wanted to sort them out, so that evildoers could be removed from the Church, there would be nowhere for those who do good to hide themselves; if we wished to allow noxious criminals to be removed from here, there would be nowhere for the innocent to flee to. So it's better that noxious criminals too should be protected by the Church, than that the innocent should be snatched from the Church. Bear these things in mind, so that, as I said, it is your presence in strength, not your savagery, that may inspire fear.

## NOTES

1. So Fischer, Kunzelmann, and van der Meer, all saying about 400. But, as we shall see, there is strong reason to doubt whether we are here dealing with a single sermon. Sections 10 to 21, with the appendix of 22, seem definitely to be from another sermon, the beginning of which has been lost. It is about a riot, in which an unpopular government official, called a soldier, *miles*, was brutally lynched. It has no obvious connection with sections 1 to 9; and it is most unlikely that with a bloody riot on his mind, Augustine would have preached at that length on the superiority of heavenly over earthly desires, before getting to the topic that was uppermost in everybody's thoughts. Both sections, however, refer to Saint Lawrence, so both were definitely preached on his feast day; so they cannot have been preached in the same year. I suppose there are references in other documents, for example in Augustine's letters, to an event as noteworthy as a riot in Hippo Regius in which a soldier was lynched; perhaps that is what enables the scholars to date the sermon—that is the second sermon—to about 400. In that case the first sermon could have been preached at any time, in the same early period, or later.

2. A Roman deacon, one of the most popular martyrs, who suffered, probably in 258, on 10 August, in the persecution launched by the Emperor Valerian. It seems, from what Augustine goes on to say, that he had a shrine or *memoria* in Hippo Regius, where frequent miracles were reported.

3. The responsorial psalm was counted as one of the readings.

4. Reading *deterioribus* with the Maurists, instead of the *terrenis*, earthly good things, of another manuscript followed by a more recent edition.

5. The ancient equivalent of candy, or sweets.

6. *Character tuus*, the sacramental character of baptism and confirmation. The language and analogy come from the imperial “character” or mark branded or tattooed on those who joined the Roman army. But he goes on to talk of catechumens too receiving this *character*. So he is not here thinking expressly in terms of a developed sacramental theology—even though he contributed enormously to its development. Catechumens were signed with the sign of the cross when they were enrolled in the catechumenate, and frequently thereafter.

7. This looks very like the end of a sermon. The rest, on the quite different topic of the lynching, would seem, at a very early stage of the manuscript tradition, to have been tacked on from another sermon, of which the first part, giving some account, presumably, of the occasion for it, has got lost.

8. Following the Maurist punctuation. The later edition punctuates, “But they say: Many bad people, many evils.” The Maurist version leads more easily into what follows, though it does rather plumb the depths of bathos. In either case we find ourselves in the middle of a matter to which we have not been introduced; hence my inference that we have to do with another sermon that has lost its opening section.

9. Clearly, there had been some kind of lynching. The Maurists have this footnote to that effect: “He is complaining about some man who had deserved ill of the people being slaughtered, not by lawful authority but by popular fury, with the mindless cruelty of those who vented their rage on the corpse of the slaughtered man” (PL 38, 1389).

10. Literally, “he has his judges, he has his authorities.” I am wondering if *habet* is not already beginning to mean “there is,” “there are,” like *hay* in Spanish, *il ya* in French. Who the victim of the lynching was will become even clearer in section 15.

11. So the victim of the lynching was a soldier; in fact, more the equivalent of a policeman, a member of the security forces, who abused his power.

12. *Non . . . milita, sed malitia.*

13. *Provincialis*, an inhabitant of the provinces; as one might have said in the heyday of the British Empire, “a colonial.”

14. He has already said it was John the Baptist. But it makes no difference; it is Christ commanding through John the Baptist.

15. That’s how he puts it, in his agitation.

16. God, not the local governor.

17. Quite how this last point fits the whole section, and how the whole section fits the topic of the lynching, it is not easy to see. Possibly, the congregation were in dread of some rough official reprisals for the lynching, and were expecting Augustine to go and intercede with the authorities, and some spiteful people started wondering if he wasn’t in collusion with them.

18. See Lk 19:23.

19. In section 11 above.

20. “Apprentice” is too restricted a word for the Latin *cliens*, but included in it. The Roman client was any dependent, or hanger-on, or poor relation, page, squire, including even bodyguard and strong-arm man.

21. Was the reference only to some recent natural disasters, or also to an event like the Emperor Theodosius’ massacre of the citizens of Thessalonica for a riot in that city—an act of imperial vengeance for which he had been publicly rebuked and excommunicated by Saint Ambrose?

22. The regular faithful are being asked to ensure that there are always enough of them present to keep the sanctuary seekers in order. I presume these last camped out in the forecourts and gardens of the basilica. Perhaps there were simple quarters set aside for them. He goes on to make it clear that he is not asking the regulars to defend the church against the authorities. No doubt many of those who had taken part in the lynching of the unfortunate, if possibly wicked, soldier, had taken sanctuary in the church.

## SERMON 303

### ON THE BIRTHDAY OF THE MARTYR LAWRENCE

Date: 426<sup>1</sup>

*The story of Lawrence's martyrdom*

1. Lawrence's martyrdom is famous, but at Rome, not here; such, I mean, is the smallness of the congregation which I see. Just as Rome cannot be hidden, so Lawrence's crown cannot be hidden. But why it should still escape the notice of this city, I cannot tell. So listen, the few of you who are here, to just a few words; because I too, in this bodily weariness and this heat, am not capable of much.<sup>2</sup>

He was a deacon, following the apostles; he was after the apostles' time. So when a persecution, which as you heard just now from the gospel had been foretold to Christians,<sup>3</sup> was raging furiously at Rome as in other places, and the goods of the Church were demanded from him, as being the archdeacon,<sup>4</sup> he is reported to have replied, "Let carts be sent with me, in which to bring the wealth of the Church."<sup>5</sup> Avarice opened wide its jaws, but wisdom knew what it was doing; the order was given immediately; as many carts as he asked for went along. Now he asked for a great many; and the more carts there were, so much greater were the hopes of loot which were raised in the persecutor's heart. He filled the carts with the poor, and returned with them; and they said to him, "What's all this?" He answered, "These are the riches of the Church."

The persecutor, made a fool of, called for fire; but Lawrence wasn't ice, that he should be afraid of flames. The former was almost on fire with rage, but the latter's soul even more so with charity.<sup>6</sup> What more to be said? A gridiron was brought, he was roasted on it. And he is said to have borne those torments with such calmness, that there was fulfilled in his case what we heard just now in the gospel, *In patience you will possess your souls* (Lk 21:19). Finally, when he was burnt on one side, scorched by the flames, but calm in his endurance, "It's now cooked," he said; "all that remains to do, turn me over and eat."<sup>7</sup>

Such was the martyrdom he achieved; that was the glory he was crowned with. The favors he obtains at Rome are so notable, they simply cannot be counted. So he is one about whom Christ said, *Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it* (Mk 8:35). He saved it through faith, he saved it through

contempt for the world, he saved it through martyrdom. What must his glory be with God, when he has won such praise from men!

*The reward prepared for all those who follow Christ  
with unqualified fidelity and perfect charity*

2. Let us follow his footsteps in faith, let us also follow in contempt for the world. It's not only to the martyrs that heavenly rewards are promised, but also to those who follow Christ with unqualified fidelity and perfect charity. They are honored, you see, among the martyrs, according to the assurance of Truth itself, where it says, *There is nobody who leaves house, or land, or parents, or brothers, or wife or children, and does not receive seven times as much in this age, while in the age to come he will have eternal life* (Mt 19:29<sup>8</sup>). What could be more glorious for anyone, than to sell all he has, and buy Christ;<sup>9</sup> to offer God that most acceptable of gifts, the unspoiled virtue of the mind, the unre-served praise of devotion; to accompany Christ when he starts coming to take vengeance on his enemies; to assist at his side when he takes his seat to judge; to be made a co-heir of Christ's, to be counted the equal of angels, of patriarchs, of apostles, of prophets, to enjoy the possession of the eternal kingdom? What persecution can subdue such thoughts, what torments can overcome them? The mind that is brave and steady, firmly founded on religious meditations, endures these things, and the spirit that is stiffened by a sure and solid faith in the future life stands unmoved against all the terrors of the devil and the threats of the world.

The eyes are closed in the persecutions, but heaven lies open.<sup>10</sup> Antichrist threatens, but Christ is protecting. Death is being inflicted, but immortality follows. The world is snatched away from the person slain, but paradise is presented to him when he is restored to life. Temporal life is extinguished, but eternal life is obtained instead. What an honor and what an assurance it is to go hence joyfully, to go out gloriously amid affliction and distress; to shut in a moment the eyes men and the world are seen with, and to open them immediately to see God! Even with an easy passage,<sup>11</sup> what a swift transition! You are suddenly withdrawn from the earth, in order to be deposited in the heavenly realms.

These are the things we must embrace with our minds and thoughts, these the things we must *meditate on day and night* (Ps 1:2). If persecution finds God's soldier such a man as that, it will be impossible for virtue that is ready for battle to be defeated. Or if the summons comes beforehand, the reward will be paid without delay to the faith which was ready for martyrdom, God being the judge. In persecution it is the soldiering, in peace it is the constancy, that is rewarded with a crown.



## NOTES

1. Fischer and Kunzelmann say between 425 and 430. I suggest 426 more precisely, because Perler, *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin*, p. 474, notes it as the only year in this period in which Augustine, already over 70, left Hippo Regius. Now the opening sentence suggests the sermon was not preached there, because we gather from Sermon 302, 1 (note 2) that Saint Lawrence had a shrine in that city, where people prayed for cures and favors. So possibly it was preached in the city of Milev, about 120 miles west of Hippo Regius, where Augustine went in the summer of 426 to take part in the election and ordination of a bishop. See Letter 213, 1.

However, there are some doubts, which I increasingly share, about the authenticity of the sermon. The Maurists found no manuscripts of it, which means they took it from the earlier printed editions. And they remark that the last two thirds of section 2, from just after the quotation from Matthew 19 (note 9 below), is lifted word for word from Cyprian's *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 13, addressed to Fortunatus. Had Augustine quoted Cyprian at such length, he would certainly have made due acknowledgments. It is of course possible, and even likely, as the Maurists also note, that a later writer like Bede or Alcuin stitched a piece of Cyprian onto a piece of Augustine, to form one sermon. But even so, my doubts remain about whether the piece they stitched Cyprian onto was genuine Augustine. If it wasn't Augustine, then the dating of it to 426 falls away. Perhaps it was a sermon by that later African bishop, Fulgentius of Ruspe, 466-533.

2. This mention of his weariness does suggest that he had recently arrived from a journey.

3. See, for example, Lk 21:12-19.

4. Deacons were the treasurers, the bursars of the Churches in ancient times.

5. This is quoted from Cyprian's *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 13.

6. The text reads, *ardebat pene furore, sed plus anima caritate*, and as it stands the subject is Lawrence; so that as it stands it seems to mean that when the fire was brought, "Lawrence was almost on fire with rage, but his soul more with charity"—which is to mean nothing but a muddle. Starting from the obvious contrast between *furore* and *caritate*, I infer that a contrast is being made between Lawrence and the persecuting judge. So we have to make the latter the subject of the first part, Lawrence the subject of the second; and thus to emend to something like this: *ardebat iste pene furore, sed plus illius anima caritate*. The earliest printed texts—and it was from such that the Maurists got this sermon—seem to have been so full of errors, that we need feel no qualms about making such emendations.

7. I have rearranged the text in the last two sentences, with the same lack of scruple as I have justified in the previous note. In the Latin text the previous sentence begins, "And when he was burnt on one side, he said. . ."; and this last sentence begins, "Finally, scorched by the flames. . ." I have simply transferred "when he was burnt on one side" to a more likely position.

8. An extremely inaccurate quotation; seven times as much, instead of a hundred times.

9. From here on we have the passage lifted from Cyprian's *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 13, addressed to Fortunatus; PL 4, 675-676.

10. See Acts 7:56.

11. That is, a death without martyrdom. I have rearranged the punctuation. The text adds "even with an easy passage," *etiam feliciter migrando* to the previous sentence (where it hardly belongs), and has "What a swift transition!" *Quanta velocitas!* as an exclamation by itself.

## SERMON 304

### ON THE FEAST DAY OF LAWRENCE THE MARTYR

Date: 417<sup>1</sup>

*Lawrence as a deacon administered the blood of Christ at the eucharist in Rome; and there he also shed his own blood for the name of Christ*

1. The Roman Church commends this day to us as the blessed Lawrence's day of triumph, on which he trod down the world as it roared and raged against him, spurned it as it coaxed and wheedled him, and in each case conquered the devil as he persecuted him. How glorious a wreath is worn by Lawrence the martyr, and with what a multitude of virtues it is adorned, as with a variety of flowers, the whole city of Rome can testify. It was in that Church, you see, as you have regularly been told, that he performed the office of deacon; there that he administered the sacred chalice of Christ's blood; there that he shed his own blood for the name of Christ.

He had been prudent as he approached the table of a potentate; that table, about which the Proverbs of Solomon were just now speaking to us, where it is written, *If you sit down to dine at the table of a potentate, observe what is set before you; and so stretch out your hand, knowing that it behooves you to prepare similar dishes* (Prv 23:1-2 LXX). The blessed apostle John clearly explained the mystery of this dinner, when he said, *Just as Christ laid down his life for us, so we too ought to lay down our lives for the brethren* (1 Jn 3:16). Saint Lawrence understood this, brothers and sisters, and he did it; and he undoubtedly prepared things similar to what he received at that table. He loved Christ in his life, he imitated him in his death.

*Different ways of following in Christ's footsteps*

2. And we too, brothers and sisters, if we truly love him, let us imitate him. After all, we won't be able to give a better proof of love than by imitating his example.<sup>2</sup> *For Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, so that we might follow in his footsteps* (1 Pt 2:21). In this sentence the apostle Peter appears to have seen that Christ suffered only for those who follow in his footsteps, and that Christ's passion profits none but those who follow in his footsteps.<sup>3</sup> The

holy martyrs followed him, to the shedding of their blood, to the similarity of their sufferings. The martyrs followed, but they were not the only ones. It's not the case, I mean to say, that after they had crossed, the bridge was cut; or that after they had drunk, the fountain dried up.

What, after all, is the hope of the good faithful, who either bear the yoke of matrimony in chastity and concord in the wedded state, or tame the allurements of the flesh by living continently as widows, or even raise the standard of a loftier sanctity, and flourishing in a new kind of virginity,<sup>4</sup> *follow the lamb wherever he goes* (Rv 14:4)? What hope, I repeat, is there for these, what hope for all of us, if the only ones who follow Christ are those who shed their blood for him? So is mother Church going to lose all those children of hers, whom she has brought forth all the more abundantly, the more secure she has been in the time of peace? In order not to lose them, is she to pray for persecution, pray for trials and temptations? Perish the thought, brothers and sisters! How, I mean to say, can anyone pray for persecution who cries out every day, *Do not bring us into temptation* (Mt 6:13)?

That garden of the Lord's, brothers and sisters, includes, yes it includes, it certainly includes not only the roses of martyrs, but also the lilies of virgins, and the ivy of married people, and the violets of widows.<sup>5</sup> There is absolutely no kind of human beings, dearly beloved, who need to despair of their vocation; Christ suffered for all.<sup>6</sup> It was very truly written about him: *who wishes all men to be saved, and to come to the acknowledgment of the truth* (1 Tm 2:4).

*The essentials of following Christ are humility and indifference  
to the allurements of the world*

3. So let us understand how Christians ought to follow Christ, short of the shedding of blood, short of the danger of suffering death. The apostle says, speaking of the Lord Christ, *Who, though he was in the form of God, did not think it robbery to be equal to God. What incomparable greatness! But he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men, and found in condition as a man. What unequalled humility! Christ humbled himself; you have something, Christian, to latch on to. Christ became obedient. Why do you behave proudly? To what point did Christ become obedient? To the point of the Word becoming flesh, of sharing our human mortality, of a triple temptation by the devil, of being mocked by the people of the Jews, of spittle and chains, of being knocked about and scourged; if that's still too little, to the point of death; and if something still has to be added about the kind of death, even the death of the cross* (Phil 2:6-8). Such is the example we have of humility, such the remedy for pride.

So why, O man, O woman, does your head swell so? Why, carrion skin, do you stretch yourself so? Why, stinking pus, do you puff yourself up so? You rant, you lament, you get steamed up, because heaven knows who has insulted you. On what grounds do you insist on satisfaction, do you thirst with gaping jaws for revenge, and not desist from your intention, until you have avenged

yourself on the one who harmed you? If you're a Christian, wait for your king; let Christ be the first to avenge himself. He hasn't yet been avenged, after all, the one who suffered so much for you. And of course that infinite greatness could either have avoided suffering altogether, or else have been immediately avenged. But while he did indeed possess such total omnipotence, he also possessed an equal measure of patience, and for this reason; that *he suffered for us, leaving us an example, so that we might follow in his footsteps* (1 Pt 2:21). Clearly, beloved, you can see that short of the shedding of our blood, short of chains and dungeons, short of the cat and the claws,<sup>7</sup> there are many ways in which we can follow Christ.

Next, after running the course of these humiliations, and laying death low, Christ ascended into heaven; let us follow him there. Let us listen to the apostle telling us, *If you have risen with Christ, savor the things that are above where Christ is, seated at God's right hand; seek the things that are above, not the things that are on earth* (Col 3:1-2). Let whatever the world offers as delightful among transient things be waved aside with disdain; whatever rough and terrible threats it roars at us be treated with scorn. And when you act like that, have no doubts that you are sticking to Christ's footsteps, so that you have the right to say boldly with the apostle Paul, *Our time is spent*<sup>8</sup> in heaven (Phil 3:20).

*It is only genuine charity that makes virtue  
unconquerable in times of trial*

4. But only then can virtue be undefeated in these trials, when charity is genuine and not pretended.<sup>9</sup> So the one who gives us real virtue is the one who pours out charity into our hearts.<sup>10</sup> How, indeed, could the blessed Lawrence have been unafraid of the fires applied to him outwardly, if he hadn't been on fire inwardly with the flames of charity? That, my brothers and sisters, is why the glorious martyr was not in dread of the atrocious heat of the flames on his body; it's because he was on fire in his mind with white-hot desire for heavenly joys. In comparison with the fervor glowing in his breast, the outward flames of his persecutors were just cold. When could he ever have borne the piercing agony of such pains if he hadn't been cherishing the joys of his eternal reward? Lastly, how could he have held this life in contempt, except by loving a better life?

*And who can harm you*, says the apostle Peter; *who*, he says, *can harm you, if you are lovers of the good?* (1 Pt 3:13). Let the persecutor wreak evil upon you; don't you falter in loving the good. You see, if you really love what is good with your whole heart, you will have the patience and equanimity to put up with any and every evil. What harm, after all, did those torments which the persecutors inflicted on him do to blessed Lawrence; except that they rendered him more glorious than ever by those very penalties, and made this day into a splendid festival for us by his precious death?<sup>11</sup>

## NOTES

1. So La Bonnardière; others, including Perler, put it after 417. But it would fit readily into Perler's scheme of Augustine's journeys in 417; preached perhaps at home in Hippo Regius just before setting out for Carthage; or else in some town along the road on his way there, but before Utica, his last stop before reaching the metropolis, where he preached his discourse on Ps 144/145 on 18 August. So this sermon on the 10th could have been preached at Thabraca, which looks as if it was a leisurely week's journey from Utica.

2. Another "inverted genitive"; he says *quam imitationis exemplum*, than the example of imitating, which I in effect translate as if it were *quam imitationem exempli*.

3. Not a very happy way of stating things, since Christ died for sinners, and his passion therefore profits sinners. The Jansenists could have used this text, and perhaps they did, to support their doctrine that Christ died only for the elect. But for the necessary qualification see note 6 below. Augustine would say, and surely rightly, that Christ's passion does indeed profit sinners, but only if they are converted and repent of their sins, which is the first step to take in Christ's footsteps, and which can only be taken because he has died for sinners.

4. *In nova virginitate*. He possibly considered the life of consecrated virginity a new kind of virginity, because this had always been valued (in women) as a desirable prelude to marriage.

5. I wonder who first thought up this garden image, now such a well-worn cliché of the spiritual writers. I doubt if it was Augustine himself.

6. A welcome qualification to what he said earlier. See note 3.

7. The cat, cat-o'-nine-tails, *flagella*; the claws, *ungulae*, hooks or steel claws which were drawn across the victim's body—one ancient form of torture that has blessedly not been carried down to our more sophisticated age.

8. Translating *conversatio* as I think Augustine understood it.

9. Virtue can only be *invicta* if charity is not *ficta*.

10. See Rom 5:5.

11. See Ps 116:15.

## SERMON 305

ON THE FEAST DAY OF THE MARTYR LAWRENCE,  
PREACHED AT THE TABLE OF SAINT CYPRIAN

Date: 413<sup>1</sup>

*The grain which dies in the ground is multiplied*

1. Your faith recognizes the grain which fell on the ground, and by dying was multiplied. Your faith, I repeat, recognizes this grain, because it is in fact dwelling in your minds. This, after all, is what Christ said about himself, as no Christian can be in two minds about.<sup>2</sup> But clearly, once that grain had died and was multiplied, many grains were scattered over the ground; one of which was also the blessed Lawrence, whose sowing we are celebrating today.

What huge crops sprang from those grains scattered over the whole wide world, we can see, we rejoice over, we in fact are; provided, however, that we too by his grace belong to the granary. Not anything and everything in the crop, you see, belongs to the granary. The same useful and nourishing rain, I mean to say, feeds both the wheat and the chaff. Away with the thought, though, that each should be stored together in the granary, although they are both nourished together in the field, and both threshed together on the threshing floor. Now is the time to choose. Before the winnowing starts, let there be a separation of moral behavior; as on a threshing floor, the grain is still being distinguished by a process of cleansing, not yet being separated by the final winnowing fork.

*Let us listen to the grain as it says, "Whoever loves his life in this age will lose it"*

2. Listen to me, holy grains, who I don't doubt are here; because if I do doubt, I won't even be a grain myself. Listen to me, I say—or rather, listen to the first grain through me. Don't love your lives in this age; don't love them, if you do love them, so that by not loving them you may preserve them; because by not loving them, you love them all the more. *Whoever loves his life in this age will lose it* (Jn 12:25). The grain is talking, the grain which fell into the ground, and was done to death so that it might be multiplied, is talking; you should listen to him, because he doesn't lie. What he advised, he did himself; he instructed by

precept, he led the way by example. Christ did not love his life in this age; that's why he came, in order to lose it here, to lay it down for our sakes, and when he wished to take it up again.<sup>3</sup>

But because he was man in such a way that he was also God—Christ, you see, is Word, soul and flesh, true God and true man; but a man without sin, who was to *take away the sin of the world* (Jn 1:29). He was clearly of a greater authority, if he could say, *I have authority to lay down my life, and I have authority to take it up again; nobody takes it away from me, but I myself lay it aside from myself, and again I take it up* (Jn 10:17-18). So since he had such great authority and power, why did he say, *Now is my soul troubled* (Jn 12:27)? Why is the man-God troubled, having such great authority, if not because there is in him the reflection of our weakness? *I have authority to lay down my life, and I have authority to take it up again*. When you hear that from Christ, it's himself in himself; when you hear that, I repeat, from Christ, it's himself in himself. When his soul is troubled as death approaches, it's himself in you. After all, the Church would not be his body, unless he were also in us.

*More on Christ's power or authority to lay down his life  
and take it up again*

3. So take a look at Christ: *I have authority to lay down my life, and I have authority to take it up again; nobody takes it away from me* (Jn 10:17-18). *I myself went to sleep*; that, you see, is what he says in the psalm: *I myself went to sleep*. As though to say, "Why are they so excited, why so exultant? Why are the Jews waving their arms with joy, as though they themselves had done anything? *I myself went to sleep. I,*" he says, "who have authority to lay down my life, by laying it down *myself went to sleep, and took my rest.*" And since he had the authority to take it up again, he added, *I rose again*; but to give the glory to the Father, *since the Lord took me up* (Ps 3:6). Don't let these words, where he says, *since the Lord took me up*, strike your minds as meaning that Christ himself did not raise up his own body. The Father raised him up, and he also raised himself up. How shall we prove to you that he raised himself up? Call to mind what he said to the Jews: *Pull down this temple, and in three days I will raise it up* (Jn 2:19.21).

So this is how you must understand Christ: as born of the virgin by his own authority; not by natural circumstance, but by his own authority; as dead by his own authority, dead in that way by his own authority. Without their realizing it, he was using bad men for his own good purposes, and transferring the howling madness of the populace to the use of his power for our happiness; and among those at whose hands he was dying he could see his own, who were going to live with him; and seeing them still raving lunatics among a mob of raving lunatics, he said, *Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34). "I," he was saying, "I, the doctor, am feeling their pulse, from the tree I am examining the sick. I'm hanging here, and I'm feeling their pulse; I'm dying, and I'm saving life; I'm shedding my blood, and with it compounding

the medicine of salvation for my enemies. They are raging, and shedding it; they will come to believe, and drink it.”

*Christ's soul was troubled, so that we shouldn't despair when our souls are troubled at the approach of death*

4. So Christ himself, our Lord and savior, the head of the Church, born of the Father without mother; our very Lord, I repeat, and savior, Jesus Christ, as far as he himself is concerned, laid down his life by an act of authority, and by the same authority took it up again. *My soul is troubled* doesn't properly belong to this authority. Here, he transposed us into himself; he saw us, he inspected us, he found us weary, took us in and took care of us; in case perhaps, when the last day came for some member of his, on which this life was to be ended, he should be troubled through human weakness, and should despair of salvation, and say he didn't belong to Christ, since he wasn't so prepared for death as to be troubled by no anxiety, and have no sadness cloud the devotion of his spirit.

So since his members were in danger of despairing, when anyone was troubled at the approach of death, reluctant to have done with this miserable life, slow to inaugurate the one that is never to end; so in case they should be broken by despair, he considered these very weak ones of his, he gathered into his bosom his most insignificant and not very brave members; these not very brave members he covered with his wings as a hen covers her chicks;<sup>4</sup> and he's so to say addressing to them, *Now is my soul troubled* (Jn 12:27). Recognize yourselves in me, so that you needn't despair when perhaps you're troubled, but can turn your gaze back to your head, and say to yourselves, “When the Lord said, *My soul is troubled*, we were in him, we were being signified. We are troubled, but we are not lost.”

*Why are you sad, my soul, and why do you disturb me?* Don't you want to be done with this miserable life? It's all the more miserable, the more it's loved even though miserable, and you don't want to be done with it; it would be less miserable if it wasn't loved. What must the blessed life be, when this miserable life is loved like this, just because it's called life? So, *why are you sad, my soul, and why do you disturb me?* You've got something you can do. Have you faltered and failed in yourself? *Hope in the Lord* (Ps 42:5.11). Are you troubled in yourself? *Hope in the Lord*, who *chose you before the foundation of the world* (Eph 1:4), who predestined you, who called you, who justified you when you were ungodly, who promised you everlasting glorification;<sup>5</sup> who for your sake endured a death he did not owe, who for your sake shed his blood, who transposed you into himself when he said, *My soul is troubled*. You belong to him, and you're afraid? And is the world going to do you any harm at all, you for whom he died, through whom the world was made? You belong to him, and you're afraid? *If God is for us, who is against us? The one who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all, how has he not also granted us everything together with him?* (Rom 8:31-32). Stand firm against these perturbed feelings, do not give in to love of this age. It tickles the fancy, wheedles and coaxes, sets its traps; you must never trust it, you must hold onto Christ.



*NOTES*

1. So Perler. The table, *mensa*, that is, the altar of Saint Cyprian, was set up at the place of his martyrdom, and a basilica built there, called the Basilica of the Field of Sextus.

2. See Jn 12:24.

3. See Jn 10:17.

4. See Lk 13:34.

5. See Rom 8:30.

## SERMON 305A

ON THE BIRTHDAY OF SAINT LAWRENCE  
PREACHED IN THE RESTORED BASILICA ON 10 AUGUST

*Date: 401<sup>1</sup>*

*Some martyrs' feast days more important than others*

1. Because the audience is getting bored and restless, the sermon was to have been canceled; but out of respect for the martyr, it has to be given. So with the Lord's help it will be so timed that it is neither burdensome, nor yet cut too short to do justice to the subject.<sup>2</sup> In Rome today has dawned as one of the greatest feasts there, which is celebrated by a great concourse of the people; we are uniting ourselves to our brothers and sisters there in one body, under one head,<sup>3</sup> absent indeed in body, but still present in spirit. After all, it's not only where the tomb of his body is, that the memory of his merits is celebrated. Devotion is owed to him everywhere; his flesh is laid in one place, but his spirit is triumphantly with the one who is everywhere.

The blessed Lawrence was, as we have been informed, a youth in body, but a man of gravity in spirit; the greener his age, the more unfading was the victor's wreath that commended him so much to our devotion. Well, he was a deacon, subordinate to the bishop in rank, equal to an apostle in his crown.<sup>4</sup> Now this kind of festival of all the glorious martyrs has been instituted in the Church so that those who didn't see them suffering may be led by faith to imitate them, and may be reminded of them by the festival. It's probable, you see, that what wasn't repeated by an annual commemoration would escape people's minds altogether. And we can't have fervent celebrations of all the martyrs everywhere, because then not a day would pass without them; I mean, you could scarcely find a single day in the whole course of the year, on which some martyrs were not somewhere rewarded with the victor's crown. But if fervent celebrations were a continuous event, they would induce boredom; while intervals between them renew our loving interest. For our part, let us simply listen to what we have been commanded, attend to what we have been promised. On the festivals of any martyrs you like, let us prepare our hearts to celebrate them in such a way that we do not cut ourselves off from imitating them.<sup>5</sup>

*Martyrs of both sexes and all ages only achieved their victory by the grace of God*

2. He was human, after all, and we too are human; we too were made by the same one as he was; we too bought for the same price as he was. And so Christians, human beings, ought not to say, "Why me?" Or rather, they ought not to say, "Not me," but "Why not me too?" You heard the blessed Cyprian,<sup>6</sup> both example and trumpet of martyrs: "In persecution," he said, "it is the soldiering, in peace the conscience that is crowned."<sup>7</sup> So none of you should think that it isn't the time for you. It isn't always the time for suffering death, but it is always the time for devoting one's life to God. Nor should any of us think we are too weak, where God is actively empowering us; or while we are fearing for ourselves, we may be despairing of the real agent.

That's why God wished there to be persons of all ages and either sex among the examples given by the martyrs. Old men have been crowned, young men crowned, teenagers have been crowned, boys crowned, men have been crowned, women crowned. And among the women every age has been crowned. Nor did the female sex say, "I am unequal, because of my sex, to subduing the devil." It concentrated rather on overthrowing the enemy by whom it had been overthrown, and outfighting by faith the one by whom it had allowed itself to be seduced. Did even women, I ask you, rely presumptuously on their own strength? It was any and every person, after all, who was told, *For what have you got that you did not receive?* (1 Cor 4:7). So the glory of the martyrs is the glory of Christ going ahead of the martyrs, filling the martyrs, crowning the martyrs.

And yet, although there is peace in one period, persecution in another, is there any period that lacks hidden persecution? It's never lacking. That lion, the dragon,<sup>8</sup> is not always raging and roaring, and he isn't either always lying in wait and setting traps, but he's always persecuting. When he's raging openly, he isn't setting traps secretly; when his traps are laid secretly, his rage isn't out in the open. That is, when he's roaring as a lion, he isn't creeping as a dragon; when he's creeping as a dragon, he isn't roaring as a lion; and yet, because he's either a lion or a dragon, he's always persecuting. When the rampaging is not to be heard, beware of the hidden traps. When the hidden traps are shown up, watch out for the lion in its rage. But you can escape both lion and dragon, if your heart is always in Christ's keeping. Anything that has to be feared in this life is going to pass away; while in the other life what is to be loved does not pass away, and what is to be feared does not pass away.

*Who are the children of the prophets,  
and who the children of those who slew the prophets?*

3. Certainly, the Lord was addressing the Jews just now in the gospel, and saying to them, *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you construct the tombs of the prophets, and you say: If we had been there in the time of our fathers, we would not have consented to them in killing the prophets.*

*Surely, you bear witness that you are the sons of those who slew the prophets. And you, for your part, fill up the measure of your fathers (Mt 23:29-32). You see, when they said, If we had been there in the time of our fathers, we would not have consented to them in killing the prophets, they confirmed that they were their children. We, though, if we keep to the straight road, don't call those who slew the prophets our fathers, but we call our fathers those who were killed by their fathers. Just as someone can forfeit his ancestry by degenerate behavior, so he can become a son by the right behavior.*

Because of course, brothers and sisters, we are called the children of Abraham.<sup>9</sup> We don't know Abraham face to face, and we don't trace our ancestry in the flesh back to his stock; so how are we his children? Not in the flesh, but in faith. *Abraham, you see, believed God, and it was accounted to him for justice (Gn 15:6; Rom 4:3).* So if it was because he believed that Abraham was just, all those after Abraham who imitate Abraham's faith have become Abraham's children. The Jews, born of his flesh, have disgraced and forfeited their ancestry; we, sprung from alien stock, have acquired by imitating him what they lost by degenerating from him.<sup>10</sup> So away with the idea that Abraham is their father, though they have come from the flesh of Abraham. Their fathers were those whom they confessed to be such. *If we had been there, they said, in the time of our fathers, we would not have consented to them in killing the prophets.*

How can you say you were not going to consent to them, when you say they are your fathers? If they were your fathers, you are their son; if you're their son, you were going to consent. But if you were not going to consent, you are not their son; if you are not their son, they are not your fathers. So this is how the Lord convicted them of being about to do what those had done, because they called them their fathers. *Certainly, he said, you yourselves bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who slew the prophets, because you have called them your fathers. And you in turn will fill up the measure of your fathers.*

*The same principle applied to those Christians who continued the custom of dancing in the place where Cyprian had been martyred*

4. And now let us consider who are the children of the slain, and who the children of the slayers. And you can see many people running along to the memorials of the martyrs, blessing their bottles<sup>11</sup> at the memorials of the martyrs, coming back soaked from the memorials of the martyrs; and yet examine them more closely, and you will find they are among the persecutors of the martyrs. They are the ones responsible for the tumults, the riots, the dances, the licentious activities which God hates. And now, because they can't get at the martyrs, now crowned in glory, with stones, they persecute them with bottles.

Who were those people, and whose children were they, whose dances were barred from the place of the holy martyr Cyprian at the recent memorial, scarcely longer ago than yesterday?<sup>12</sup> They were certainly dancing there, and enjoying themselves there; and they were looking forward with great eagerness to that

celebration, expecting to enjoy it, and they were always very keen to come to that day. Among whom are they to be counted? Among the persecutors of the martyrs, or among the children of the martyrs? They turned up; when they were forbidden to dance they broke out into a riot. The children of the martyrs praise them, their persecutors dance; the children sing hymns, the others organize parties. So it doesn't make much difference how they seem to honor the martyrs; they are the same sort, after all, when they do honor them, as those people were who said, *If we had been there in those times, we would not have consented to our fathers in killing the martyrs—I mean, in killing the prophets* (Mt 23:30).

Consent now to the faith of the martyrs, and we can believe that you would not be ready to consent to the killers of the martyrs. What were the martyrs crowned for? For going God's way, I rather think, for their endurance, for even loving their enemies, for making supplication on their behalf. That is the crown of the martyrs, that's the merit of the martyrs. You love it, imitate it, praise it? You're a child of the martyr. You play about with a life of the opposite sort? Then too, when the time comes, you will find yourself playing an opposing hand.<sup>13</sup>

*Persecutions are never wanting for Christians*

5. Accordingly, dearly beloved, since persecution, as I said, is never wanting, and the devil is either laying stealthy traps or raging openly, we ought always to be prepared, with our minds fixed on the Lord; and as far as we can, to be praying for courage and strength from the Lord for ourselves amid these vexations, tribulations, trials and temptations, since by ourselves we are so small, we are just nothing. What are we to say about ourselves? You heard the apostle Paul when he was read: *Just as the sufferings of Christ, he says, abound in us, in the same way too our consolation abounds through Christ* (2 Cor 1:5). As it says in the psalm, *According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, so your exhortations, Lord, make glad my soul* (Ps 94:19). Just as this is said in the psalm, *According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, so your exhortations, Lord make glad my soul*, so too it is said by the apostle, *Just as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, in the same way too our consolation abounds through Christ*. We would fail altogether and fall away when the persecutor came along, if the consoler and comforter were not at hand.

And because neither the power of endurance, nor the easing of the pressures of life for a time because of the needs of the ministry came from them,<sup>14</sup> notice what he said: *I wish to inform you, brothers and sisters, about our tribulation which happened in Asia, that we were weighed down beyond measure, and far beyond our powers*. That tribulation went far beyond human powers; but not, surely, beyond divine assistance? *We were weighed down, he says, beyond measure, and far beyond our powers*. How much beyond our powers? Notice what he says about the powers of the spirit. *To the extent that we were even weary of living* (2 Cor 1:8). How seriously the apostle must have been affected by the innumerable pressures on him if, while charity was prompting him to go

on living, weariness was barring him from life! How charity was forcing him to stay alive, that charity of which he says in another place, *But to remain in the flesh is necessary on your account* (Phil 1:24)!

There you are then; persecution had increased so much, and tribulation so much, that he was even weary of living. See how fear and trembling had come upon him, and darkness had covered him, as you heard when it was said in the psalm. It's the voice, you see, of the body of Christ, the voice of Christ's members. Do you want to recognize your own voice there? Be a member of Christ. *Fear*, it says, *and trembling fell upon me, and darkness covered me. And I said, Who will give me wings like a dove's, and I will fly away and take my rest?* (Ps 55:5-6). Isn't this what the apostle seems to have said, with the words, *to the extent that we were even weary of living?* He felt weariness, after a fashion, from the birdlime of the flesh, when he wanted to fly away to Christ; a plethora of tribulations was infesting the way, but not blocking it altogether.

He was weary of living, but not in that eternal life about which he says, *For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*. But because he was held down here by charity, how does he go on? *If, though, to live in the flesh here is the fruit of my work—and which I should choose I do not know. But I am being torn both ways, having a longing to cast off and be with Christ* (Phil 1:21-23). *Who will give me wings like a dove's?* (Ps 55:5). *But to remain in the flesh is necessary on your account* (Phil 1:24). He had given in to the cheepings of his chicks; he was covering them with the spread of his wings, cherishing his chicks, as he says himself: *I became a little one in your midst, like a nurse cherishing her children* (1 Thess 2:7).

*The way of a hen with her chicks*

6. And notice, brothers and sisters, it was read just now in the gospel: *How often have I wished to gather your children together as a hen does her chicks, and you would not!* (Mt 23:37). Pay attention to the hen, pay attention also to the other birds which build their nests under our eyes. They hatch their eggs, they feed their fledglings; you won't see any of them making itself weak on a level with its young. Now observe the habits of the hen, when it's rearing its chicks; how it changes its voice, so that it breaks into a kind of hoarseness. Its very feathers are not smooth and alert, but ruffled and drooping; so that if you saw another bird whose nest you didn't know, you couldn't tell whether it had eggs or fledglings; but when you see a hen, even if you don't see its eggs, and don't see its chicks, you can tell from its very voice and its body language that it's a mother.

So what did our mother Wisdom do? She became weak in the flesh, in order to gather chicks together, in order to lay eggs and hatch them. But *the weakness of God is stronger than men* (1 Cor 1:25); it was under these wings of his weakness, but also under the hidden power of his divinity, that he wished to gather together the children of Jerusalem. This is what he had taught his apostle, because this is what he was himself doing in him. This, after all, is what the

apostle says himself: *Do you wish to have experience of the one who is speaking in me, of Christ?* (2 Cor 13:3). And he says the sufferings of Christ abounded in him;<sup>15</sup> not his own sufferings, but Christ's sufferings. After all, he was in the body of Christ, and was a member of Christ; and whatever was being done by the apostle and by the member of Christ's body in the way of clucking over chicks, the head was doing.

So this apostle, paying attention to the weakness of his chicks, in his own innermost feelings and desires was longing to fly away like a dove, but out of charity toward his chicks was ready to remain like a hen. *We*, he said, *in ourselves had the answer to death, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead, who has snatched us from so many deaths, and will snatch us; in whom we hope that he will also go on snatching us* (2 Cor 1:9-10).<sup>16</sup> "Has snatched" and "will snatch"; what is he saying? He is preserving this life of ours for you. He has snatched it, you see, from many deaths in case it should be suppressed by the persecutors, in case it should be crowned sooner than would be good for the chicks, according to that other thing he said, *But to remain in the flesh is necessary on your account. But confident of this, I know that I shall remain, and continue to remain with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith* (Phil 1:24-25). Keen desire was pulling him to one thing, necessity was retaining him somewhere else. *To cast off*, he says, *and be with Christ is by much more the best* (Phil 1:23). He didn't say this was necessary, but the best. I mean, whatever is the best is sought for its own sake; whatever is necessary is taken on out of necessity; that's why it's called necessary.

*By the works of mercy, generated by necessity, we arrive at eternal life,  
as by a ship taking us home*

7. It's necessity that has imposed its name on necessary things; accordingly, this food which we make use of is now necessary for us; for sustaining this temporal life it's necessary food. But that best food of power and wisdom<sup>17</sup> is *the living bread* (Jn 6:51), which always nourishes, never diminishes. That is the best, this is necessary. Accordingly, when this necessity of hunger and of sustaining the mortal body has passed, this food will no longer be necessary. After all, what does the apostle say? *Food for the belly, and the belly for food; but God will bring to nought both the one and the other* (1 Cor 6:13). When, though, will he bring them to nought? When this embodiment of soul rises again to become an embodiment of spirit;<sup>18</sup> then there will be no neediness, and there will be no works of necessity then.

All these, you see, brothers and sisters, and what are called good works here, and the very works we are admonished to perform every day, are works of necessity. What is so good, what so splendid, what so praiseworthy for a Christian as to *break your bread to the hungry, to bring the needy without shelter into your house, to see a man naked and clothe him* (Is 58:7), to see the dead and bury them, to see people quarreling and make peace, to see the sick and visit or heal them?<sup>19</sup> These are all praiseworthy works. Examine them carefully, and

observe that necessity is the mother of them all. I mean, you break your bread, because you see someone hungry; if nobody was hungry, for whom would you break your bread? Take away the necessity of another person's misery, there will be no need for your mercy. But all the same, it's through these works which necessity has generated that we arrive at that life where there will be no necessity, as by a ship taking us to our home country. For those who are always going to stay at home, never going to travel abroad, there will be no need of a ship; but the ship which won't be needed there is the very thing that brought them there. When we get there, these works will be no more; but unless they are carried out here, we cannot get there.

So then, look lively with the good works of necessity, so that you may be blessed with the enjoyment of that eternity where necessity now dies, because death, the mother of all necessities will itself die. *For this perishable thing must put on imperishability, and this mortal thing put on immortality.* When we say to death, *Where, death, is your victory? Where, death, is your sting?* (1 Cor 15:53.55), death which has been swallowed up and crushingly defeated will be told that *the last enemy to be destroyed will be death* (1 Cor 15:26).

*This life is really only one long process of dying,  
which of course is not the case with the future life*

8. Now, though, we are fighting death with all the works of necessity; every deficiency, after all, is pulling us toward death, and everything we do to sustain ourselves is calling us back from death; and the body's changeability is such, that in some strange way deaths of one sort are being fended off by deaths of another. Anything that is made use of, when it cannot last for a long time, is a kind of commencement of death. Take a look now at this life; if anything is made use of, when it can't last too long, when if you do continue too long, you die, is a commencement of death; and yet, unless it's made use of, another kind of death cannot be fended off. For example, you aren't eating; if you have eaten and digested your food, you are being nourished. When you are not eating, you are making use of fasting, in order to fend off from yourself the death which gluttony is going to cause; unless you make use of fasting and abstinence, you won't fend that one off. So just as you've made use of fasting to avoid death by gluttony, in the same way you are going to make use of food to avoid death by fasting. Whichever of the two you make use of, after all, if you persevere in it, it will be the end of you.

You've been tired out with walking; if you go on and on walking, your very tiredness will be the end of you, and you will die. So in order not to be done in by walking, you sit down to rest; continue sitting long enough, and you will die of that. Deep sleep has overwhelmed you; you must wake up some time, or you'll die. You'll die of being awake, if you don't go to sleep again. Give me anything you make use of to help in fending off an evil that was weighing on you, which you can be so sure of that you want to persist with it all the time; whatever you make use of, it will itself become something to be afraid of. So in



all this chopping and changing of being done in and being helped, we are fighting with death.

*But when this perishable thing has put on imperishability, and this mortal thing has put on immortality, death will be told, Where, death, is your striving? Where, death, is your sting?* (1 Cor 15:54-55). We shall see, we shall praise, we shall remain. There will be no neediness there, no assistance will be required. You don't find a beggar there to break your bread to, or a strange visitor to take into your house. You don't find anyone thirsty, whom you can offer a drink, or naked, whom you can clothe, or sick, whom you can visit; or quarreling, whom you can reconcile, or dead, whom you can bury. All are taking their fill there of the food of justice and the drink of wisdom, all have been attired in immortality, all are living in their eternal home country. The health of them all is that same eternity, eternal health, eternal concord. Nobody quarrels, nobody looks for a judge, nobody for a settlement by arbitration, nobody for a vindictive sentence. There is no sickness, no death.

*We can say what will not be there; we cannot say what will be*

9. We have been able to list these things that won't be there; but what will be there, who can possibly say? *What eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it come up into the heart of man* (1 Cor 2:8). So the apostle then is quite right to say, *The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the overwhelming glory that will be revealed in us* (Rom 8:18). Whatever you have suffered, Christian, realize that it is nothing, compared with what you are going to receive. You simply cannot grasp and see what you will be; so what will that be like which cannot be grasped by the one who is going to grasp it?

It surpasses all our weakness, surpasses all our thoughts, surpasses all our understanding; and yet that is what we shall be. *Dear beloved, says John, we are the children of God*—by adoption, of course, by faith, by a pledge. We have received a pledge, brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> Can one who has given such a pledge ever disappoint us? *We are the children, he says, of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. We know, he says, that when he appears, we shall be like him, since we shall see him as he is* (1 Jn 3:2). He said, "It has not yet appeared," and he did not say what it is that has not yet appeared. *It has not yet appeared what we shall be.* Might he have said, "This is what we shall be," and "that is what we shall be like"? Whatever he might have said, who would he have said it to? I don't dare to say, "Who would have said it?" but certainly "Who would he have said it to?" And perhaps, after all, there was someone who might have said it, because he is the one who was reclining on Christ's breast,<sup>21</sup> and from his breast in that banquet he was drinking wisdom. Having taken his fill of this wisdom, he broke out with, *In the beginning was the Word* (Jn 1:1).

So this is what he said: *We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, since we shall see him as he is.* Like whom? The one, of course, whose children we are. *Beloved, he said, we are the children of God, and it has not yet appeared*

*what we shall be. We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, whose children we are, since we shall see him as he is. Right now, if you wish the one whom you will be like to be right there,<sup>22</sup> if you wish to know whom you will be like, look at him, if you can. You can't do so yet. So you don't know the one you will be like; for that reason you don't know how like him you will be. So by still not knowing what he is, you don't know either what you will be yourself.*

*The congregation must not think that they need the prayers of the bishops, and the bishops don't need theirs*

10. So by meditating on all this, dearly beloved, let us always be looking forward to our everlasting joy, and always praying for courage and strength in our temporal labors and trials—whether we up here for you, or you for us. I mean to say, brothers and sisters, you shouldn't think that our prayers are needed by you, and that your prayers aren't needed by us. We all need each other's prayers for one another, because these very prayers for one another are fused together by charity, and from this sacrifice, as from the altar of mutual loving-kindness, there rises to the Lord the sweetest possible fragrance.<sup>23</sup> I mean, if the apostles asked people to pray for them, how much more should we do so, being so very, very far from their equals, but eager as best we can to follow in their footsteps, and neither capable of knowing nor brazen enough to say how far we succeed?

So they then, such great men as they were, wanted prayer to be made for them by the Church, and they used to say, *because we are your glory, just as you also are ours, to the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (2 Cor 1:14). They were praying for each other before the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, glory on the day, weakness before the day. One should pray in weakness, in order to rejoice in glory. After all, at different times, but still in one and the same time we are all going to arrive there; for going away from here there are different times, for receiving what is there, only one time. We shall be gathered together, you see, all at once and at one and the same time, in order to receive what we have believed and desired at different times, just like those workmen in the vineyard. Some were hired at the first hour, others at the third, others at the sixth, others at the ninth, others at the tenth.<sup>24</sup> They were called at different times, but at one and the same time they were all paid their wages.

Turning to the Lord, etc.

## NOTES

1. There is unanimity among the scholars about this date. Augustine, as so frequently, was in Carthage for most of the summer. The Restored Basilica, *Basilica Restituta*, was the cathedral of the city, according to an ancient historian. A few weeks later a Council of the African Church was due to be held in it, which would be attended by emissaries from the Roman Church, with a message

from Pope Anastasius, urging the African bishops to act with vigor against the Donatists. This sermon was clearly preached in the presence of several of Augustine's fellow bishops, and I guess, of the Roman legates. As I reconstruct the context and circumstances of the sermon, he wasn't intending to preach at all, perhaps wasn't thinking of celebrating the feast of Saint Lawrence at all. But the feast was celebrated, perhaps at the insistence of the Roman delegation, and the African bishops, in particular the primate and bishop of Carthage, Aurelius, put pressure on the reluctant Augustine, then a very junior bishop, to preach. So he preaches a rambling and in many ways rather bad sermon, that goes on longer than he had intended.

2. In fact, it must have lasted well over half an hour. In the first sentence, "was to have been canceled," *subtrahendus fuit*, could be translated, "should have been canceled." I infer that Augustine had wanted to cancel it, but was prevailed on to preach by the other bishops, out of deference to the Roman emissaries. And so in the end he rambled on, as reluctant speakers often do, much too long.

3. Christ, not the Pope.

4. And that is all he has to say about Saint Lawrence in the whole sermon! I detect a bit of a snub to the Roman visitors, to show that he wasn't too pleased at their indirectly pressurizing him to preach; and I imagine they weren't too pleased with his sermon.

5. A hint of the attack he is going to launch on certain popular ways of celebrating.

6. In whom Augustine and his listeners, staunch African patriots all, were much more interested than in the Roman Lawrence. The mood, to judge from the later sermons on the saint which we have already seen, must have changed in the years to come. Cyprian was the trumpet of martyrs, either because he trumpeted their triumphs, or because he roused Christians to face martyrdom; see 1 Cor 14:8.

7. From Cyprian's *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 13, addressed to Fortunatus. But at the end of Sermon 303 it was quoted differently: "constancy" instead of "conscience." What Cyprian actually wrote was "conscience."

8. A lion in 1 Pt 5:8, a dragon in Rv 12:3. We are stuck with "dragon," I think, for a translation of *draco*. But we mustn't picture the dragon of legend, a kind of monstrous lizard breathing out fire and brimstone; instead just a large snake without the feet and claws.

9. See Rom 4:16; Gal 3:29.

10. Throughout this passage he is using the verb *degenero* in two senses; both in the strict sense of falling away from, losing, one's ancestry; and in the sense it always has in English, and almost always in Latin, of being degenerate.

11. He actually says "cups," *calices*. But "bottles" conveys the whole sense and atmosphere rather better to us, I think.

12. Possibly a memorial celebration of the seven Maccabee brothers on 1 August. The place of Cyprian's martyrdom, the *mensa Cypriani* (see Sermon 305, note 1), seems to have been the favorite place for celebrating any martyrs. The dances and parties would have been the same kind of popular celebration of the martyrs as Augustine had taken a leading part in suppressing at Hippo Regius a few years earlier, shortly after being ordained priest in 393. See Letter 29, PL 33, 114.

13. A reference, the Maurists suggest, surely rightly, to the left-hand side on the day of judgment, Mt 25:33. I have changed the metaphor rather drastically, in order to keep the word "hand." He talks of *ferre vitam contrariam* and *referre manum contrariam*.

14. From Paul's correspondents, I suppose. It's a very peculiar sentence; what was no doubt vaguely intended to be a general statement turned into a particular one.

15. See 2 Cor 1:5.

16. Here he is finally taking up again and completing a quotation and a chain of thought which he started, and dropped, at the beginning of section 5.

17. See 1 Cor 1:24.

18. See 1 Cor 15:44.

19. See Mt 25:35-36.

20. See 2 Cor 1:22.

21. See Jn 13:23.

22. *Si vis esse, cui similis eris.* This could more naturally be translated, “if you wish to be the one whom you will be like.” But is there—at least here—any question of our wishing to be God? What is being discussed is knowledge of what we shall be, not being what we shall be.

23. See Gn 8:21; Phil 4:18.

24. See Mt 20:1-8. Did Augustine really say “tenth” and not “eleventh”?

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

### Abbreviations of Names

(B)	Anne Marie La Bonnardière	(M)	Christine Mohrmann
(Ba)	Tarcisius van Bavel	(Maur)	Maurists
(Be)	Bonifatius Fischer (Beuron)	(Me)	Frits van der Meer
(D)	Michel Denis	(Mo)	Paul Monceau
(DB)	Donatien De Bruyne	(Mor)	Germain Morin
(Ét)	Raymond Étaix	(P)	Othmar Perler
(F)	Georges Folliet	(Po)	Suzanne Poque
(K)	Adalbert Kunzelmann	(V)	Pierre-Patrick Verbraken
(L)	Cyrille Lambot	(W)	André Wilmart

### Abbreviations of Works

<b>CCL</b>	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnhout-Paris, 1953)
<b>CSEL</b>	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna, 1866)
<b>MA</b>	<i>Miscellanea Agostiniana</i> (2 vols.; Rome, 1930-31). The first volume is <i>Sermones post Maurinos reperti</i> , ed. G. Morin
<b>NBA</b>	Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice)
<b>PL</b>	Patrologia Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1878-90)
<b>PLS</b>	Patrologiae Latinae Supplementum, ed. A. Hamann (Paris, 1957)
<b>PW</b>	<i>Paulys Realencyklopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , new ed. by G. Wissowa et al. (Stuttgart, 1893).
<b>RB</b>	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i> (Maredsous, 1884).
<b>SC</b>	Sources Chrétiennes
<b>SPM</b>	Stromata Patristica et Mediaevalia 1 (= C. Lambot, <i>S. Aurelii Augustini Sermones selecti duodeviginti</i> ) (Utrecht, 1950).

### Short Titles of Frequently Cited Works

<b>Borgomeo</b>	<i>L'Eglise P. Borgomeo, L'Eglise de ce temps dans la prédication de saint Augustin</i> (Paris, 1972)
<b>Mohrmann</b>	<i>Études C. Mohrmann, Études sur le latin des chrétiens I</i> (Rome, 1958); II (Rome, 1961)
<b>Mohrmann</b>	<i>Sondersprache C. Mohrmann, Die altchristliche Sondersprache in den Sermones des hl. Augustinus I. Einführung, Lexikologie, Wortbildung</i> (Latinitas Christianorum Primaeva 3; Nijmegen, 1932)
<b>Pontet</b>	<i>L'exégèse M. Pontet, L'exégèse de saint Augustin prédicateur</i> (Théologie 7; Paris, 1946)
<b>Poque</b>	<i>Augustin d'Hippone S. Poque (ed.), Augustin d'Hippone. Sermons pour la Paque</i> (SC 116; Paris, 1966)
<b>Verbraken</b>	<i>Études P.-P. Verbraken, Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de saint Augustin</i> (Instrumenta Patristica 12; Steenbrugge-The Hague, 1976)

Nr.	Theme	Date	Edition
273	Various Saints	January 21, 396 (K, B, Be, P)	PL 38:1247-1252
274	St. Vincent	January 22, 410/412 (K, Be)	PL 38:1252-1253
275	St. Vincent		PL 38:1254-1255
276	St. Vincent	January 22 St. Vincent	PL 38:1255-1257 CSEL 21:273-276
277	St. Vincent	January 22, 410/412 (K) 413-415 (K, B, Be, P)	PL 38:1257-1268
277/A	St. Vincent	January 22 St. Vincent	Caillau I, 47 MA 1:243-245 PLS 2:417-419
278	Convers. of Paul Pardon of sins Acts 9:1-30; Mt 6:12	Easter season 400-410 (Po) Easter seas. 412-416 (K,Be)	PL 38:1268-1275
279	Convers. of Paul Conv. of Faustus	June 23, 401 (K, L, P, B)	Morin 1 MA 1:589-593 PL 38:1275-1280 PLS 2:657-660
280	Saints Perpetua and Felicitas	March 7	PL 38:1280-1284
281	Saints Perpetua and Felicitas	March 7	PL 38:1284-1285
282	Saints Perpetua and Felicitas	March 7	PL 38:1285-1286
283	Mass. Martyrs	412-416 (K, Be)	PL 38:1286-1288 <i>Fructus Centesimus</i> , Steenbrugge (1989) 109-113
284	Saints Marianus and James	May 6, 397 (L, P) May 8, 418 (K, B)	PL 38:1288-1293
285	Saints Castus and Emilius	May 22 397 (L, P, Be) 405-410 (B, Mo) c. 416 (K)	PL 38:1293-1297
286	Saints Gervasius and Protasius	June 19 c. 425 (K, L, B) 426-430 (P)	PL 38:1297-1301
287	Birth of St. John the Baptist	June 24, 425/430	PL 38:1301-1302
288	Birth of St. John the Baptist	June 24, 401 (K, Be P)	PL 38:1302-1308
289	Birth of St. John the Baptist	June 24, before 410 (K, Be)	PL 38:1308-1312
290	St. John the Baptist	June 24, 412/416 (K)	PL 38:1312-1316
291	St. John the Baptist	June 24, 412/416 (K, Be)	PL 38:1316-1319
292	St. John the Baptist Mt 7:17	June 24, 393/405 (K, B, Be)	PL 38:1327-1335
293	St. John the Baptist	June 24, 413 (K, B) after 400 (Ba)	PL 38:1319-1327
293/A	St. John the Baptist	June 24	Frangipane 7 MA 1:223-226

Nr.	Theme	Date	Edition
293/B	St. John the Baptist	401 (K, P, Be)	Frangipane 8 MA 1:227-231
293/C	St. John the Baptist	June 24	Mai 101 MA 1:351-352 PLS 2:497-499
293/D	St. John the Baptist	June 24	Guelfer. 22 MA 1:510-515 PLS 2:593-598
293/E	St. John the Baptist	June 24	Caillau I, 57 MA 1:245-247 PLS 2:419-421
294	[S. Guddenis]	June 27, 413 (K, B, Be, P) after 400 (Ba)	PL 38:1335-1348
295	Saints Peter and Paul	June 9, 405/411 (K, B, Be) before 405 (Mo)	PL 38:1348-1352
296	Saints Peter and Paul	June 29, 410/411	Casinen. I, 133-138 MA 1:401-412 PL 38:1352-1359 PL 38:1359-1365
297	Saints Peter and Paul	June 29, 416/420 (K, Be)	PL 38:1365-1367 SPM 1:95-99
298	Saints Peter and Paul	June 29, 416/420 (K, B, Be) 426-430 (P)	PL 38:1367-1376
299	Saints Peter and Paul	June 29, 418	
299/A	Saints Peter and Paul	June 29	Mai 19 MA 1:307-310 PLS 2:462-464
299/B	Saints Peter and Paul	June 29	Guelfer, 23 MA 1:516-521 PLS 2:598-603
299/C	Saints Peter and Paul	June 29, 416/420 (K, Be)	Guelfer, 24 MA 1:521-527 PLS 2:603-608
299/D	Scil. Martyrs	July 17 by 413 (P)	Denis 16 MA 1:75-80
299/E	Scil. Martyrs	July 17, 397? (L,P)	Guelfer. 30 MA 1:550-557 PLS 2:625-632
299/F	Scil. Martyrs	July 17	Lambot 9 RB 50 (1938) 20-24 PLS 2:788-792
300	Holy Maccabees	August 1	PL 38:1376-1380
301	Holy Maccabees	August 1 c. 417 (K, Be)	PL 38:1380-1385
301/A	Holy Maccabees Lk 14:28-33	August 1 before 400 (K, Be, V, P)	Denis 17 MA 1:81-89
302	St. Lawrence	August 10 c. 400 (K, Be)	Guelfer. 25 SPM 1:100-111 PL 38:1385-1393
303	St. Lawrence	August 10, 425/430 (K, Be)	PL 38:1393-1395

Nr.	Theme	Date	Edition
304	St. Lawrence	August 10, 417 (B) after 417 (K, Be, P)	PL 38:1395-1397
305	St. Lawrence	August 10, 413? (P) before 417 (K, Be)	PL 38:1397-1400
305/A	St. Lawrence Mt 23:29-39	August 10, 401	Denis 13 MA 1:55-64

For a complete Chronological Table refer to Section III, Volume I, pages 138-163.



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